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**T**HIS BOOKLET is a compilation of the series of articles which Mike Gorman wrote on child welfare problems in the state of Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene is putting them in bound form because it believes they are the most penetrating expose in print of our current failure to deal intelligently with the problems created by our delinquent, dependent and orphaned children.

Because children's institutions in most states in the country are little better than those in Oklahoma, the committee feels individuals and organizations throughout the country interested in child welfare will benefit greatly from a study of Gorman's proposals for a sweeping reform in our whole philosophy and present method of treatment of our so-called "problem children."

Gorman's articles, begun after six months of research during which he studied child welfare programs in effect in 26 states, are already bearing considerable fruit. The Oklahoma Children's Code Commission, with which he has worked very closely, has recently recommended to the 22nd legislature a sweeping series of bills setting up a Youth division in the

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state department of public welfare, establishing a child study center and providing for widespread reforms in child adoption, governing of children's institutions and licensing of public and private child welfare agencies.

However, strong citizen support is needed to push these bills through the legislature. In addition, Gorman is fighting for greatly enlarged appropriations for all the orphanages and training schools in the state. It is imperative that every citizen interested in the welfare of our children contact his state senator and representative to gain support for the Code Commission proposals and enlarged appropriations for the children's institutions. Citizens or civic organizations wanting information on what they can do to push this legislation should contact the Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene.

Of Mike Gorman, the author of these articles, Rev. W. H. Alexander, president of the Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene, has said:

"Mike Gorman has raised the whole level of care and treatment in the field of social and human welfare in Oklahoma. He has made history and in doing so, has raised Oklahoma to a higher plane among her sister states."

Gorman has been a crusading reporter in the field of human welfare since he joined *The Daily Oklahoman* staff in 1945. During the past four years, he has battled for better mental hospitals, for an improvement in wages and hours for nurses, for expansion of the medical school and medical training, for support for the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, and for countless other causes in the field he has chosen to work in.

For the sensational success of his mental hospital crusade, a two-year battle, he received the 1948 Special Lasker award on May 1. He is the first newspaperman so honored. Further recognition came to him when the September issue of *The Reader's Digest* carried a condensation of his "*Oklahoma Attacks Its Snake Pits*" as its book supplement.

He has written three booklets in the field of mental hygiene—"Misery Rules in State Shadowland," "*Let There Be Light*," and "*If We Can Love*." All three have been indorsed by the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, have exceeded printings of 10,000 each, and have been distributed in all 48 states and 11 foreign countries.

**W. James Logan, Executive Secretary,  
Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene**

*The sponsors wish to thank Mr. E. K. Gaylord, editor and publisher of The Daily Oklahoman, for permission to reprint these articles which originally appeared in that paper during September and October, 1948.*

**For additional copies of this booklet, write to: The Oklahoma  
Committee for Mental Hygiene, 620 N.W. 21 Oklahoma City.**

*Photographs by George Tapscott  
Reprinted through the courtesy of The Daily Oklahoman*

# OKLAHOMA'S PROBLEM CHILDREN



By **MIKE GORMAN**

*Author of*

*"Misery Rules In State Shadowland," "If We Can Love," "Let There Be Light,"  
and "Oklahoma Attacks Its Snake Pits"*

A FEW years back, a sociological study was made of the inmates of the reformatory at Granite. It disclosed that four of five offenders, or an average of 80 percent were "graduates" of the state training school for boys, then located at Pauls Valley, now at Stringtown.

A rather shocking indictment of our training schools in Oklahoma, but not much worse than national figures which show that 70 percent of the inmates of these children's institutions graduate from juvenile delinquency into adult crime.

Oklahoma maintains four institutions for delinquent children—the training school for white boys at Stringtown, the industrial school for white girls at Tecumseh, the training school for Negro boys at Boley, and the state training school for Negro girls at Taft. In addition, the state maintains two institutions for its dependent and neglected: The Whittaker State home at Pryor and the orphanage for Negro boys which is part of the Deaf, Blind and Orphan Institute at Taft.

After study of each of these institutions, this reporter can state they are training schools in name only. A literal-minded person might insist they offer training of a sort—they teach children to talk out of the corners of their mouths, crib cigarets or, at worst, indulge in sex irregularities.

It's like the story of the boy in a children's institution in another state who was about to be paroled:

"What did you learn here?" the staff member asked.

"Well, I learned how to pick a lock four ways."

They are mass-custodial institutions, failing in the vital job of rehabilitating

the close to a thousand children who are wards of the state of Oklahoma. A delinquent child commits an offense, receives a sentence as punishment, works his sentence out and, a few years later winds up at Granite. A few years after that, as statistics show, he "graduates" from Granite to McAlester.

The following general indictment of these institutions by John R. Ellington in his "Protecting Our Children from Criminal Careers" applies rather closely to Oklahoma's institutions:

"There appears no way to avoid the admission that prisons and institutions for children, as for adults, continue to be no more than schools for crime . . . The system requires the institutions to receive whatever commitments the judges send them . . . They have to take youths of all grades of intelligence . . . They have to take dangerous and brilliant abnormal personalities with essentially normal youths . . . They are mammoth institutions and even so they are perennially over-crowded, forced to pack double-decker bunks in dormitories and two boys in single rooms.

"So long as all types of offenders are dumped together into our mass-custody institutions, custody must be their first responsibility . . . The mass treatment custodial institution is a failure and no amount of surgical tinkering will make it anything but a source of infection to the community. This is the evidence of a century and a half of experience with imprisonment for delinquency and crime."

As to the philosophy that dominates the training schools in Oklahoma, it is that found by Drs. T. C. Holy and G. B. Stahly of Ohio State university

in their survey of Ohio's Lancaster School for Boys. They write:

"The philosophy of the school is based on two sets of facts. The first is that since the boy has sinned he owes a debt to society; he must therefore be punished. He is not looked upon as an individual with potentialities which need to be developed; he is thought of as a criminal. He is regarded as a problem boy rather than a boy with problems."

COUNTY after county in Oklahoma dumps its unwanted and neglected in these institutions, to be held until they are 21. The only time the public is made aware of the existence of these institutions is when there are escapes. But why are these children sent to institutions in the first place, if not because the community has failed them? Experts estimate at least half of the 40,000 children in state training schools for delinquent children could be spared institutional confinement if their communities were provided with social agencies for handling special problems in other ways.

Albert Deutsch, an acknowledged authority in the field, writes:

"They wouldn't need to be sent to reform schools if there were enough adequately trained probation officers attached to juvenile courts to give minor offenders guidance at home, enough facilities for taking care of children during parents' working hours, enough good foster homes and enough volunteer workers dedicated to the task of rehabilitating children in trouble."

In the past two decades, a number of states have adopted programs for rehabilitating delinquent children through individual study, rehabilitating schooling, and searching care. Oklahoma remains one of the citadels of the "they're bad kids, they've got to be punished" philosophy.

Oklahoma has no preceptible program, has done little or no thinking about this vital problem. During approximately six months of part-time research in preparation for this series, I came across standards for children's institutions adopted by Alabama, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin among others.

Not only does Oklahoma lack a comprehensive approach; there hasn't been one thorough survey of the objectives

and needs of these institutions in their long history. As a matter of fact, you can't locate even the most rudimentary data on their inception and development.

Howard Hopkirk, executive director of the Child Welfare League of America, after a survey of 350 children's institutions over a 20-year period, wrote this of public apathy:

"They (the citizens) do not expect their own children to live in a child-caring institution, and therefore it is not so real to them as are public schools and hospitals which serve them personally. Intolerance of ineffective service to dependent children is doubly required of us because the children cannot speak for themselves and because those standing in loco parentis are not always their ready advocates."

### *Major Deficiencies Outlined*

To itemize the faults found in Oklahoma's present "care" of its delinquent, neglected and dependent children would take a book. The following is a list of some of the major deficiencies:

**1—Political Control.** Since statehood, the children's orphanages and delinquent institutions have been the pawns of political patronage and legislative plum-passing under the sponsor system in which a particular legislator is given power to place one of his henchmen in a key job. The present administration is trying hard to halt patronage excesses, and its key appointments have been outstanding.

Administrative control of the institutions is in the hands of the board of affairs. The National Conference on Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency, composed of 800 state and federal social welfare leaders, adopted this statement of principle in 1946:

"It is the opinion of authorities in this field that such lay boards should not be the controlling administrative body in an age of specialties and professional techniques."

Because of political control of children's institutions in Oklahoma there has never been continuity of program. One superintendent starts a program of military training; the next superintendent throws it out. One administration is severely disciplinary; the next is easy-going. One administration starts a vocational training program; the next drops it cold. Effect of these quick changes on children who have lived under five or six of these sleight-of-hand administrations can be disastrous.

**2—Lack of Diagnosis.** Commitment of children to the various institutions in Oklahoma today, and for 40 years past, is haphazard. There is no physical or psychological examination of the child before he is committed. For the end-result of this policy, you can journey to any of our institutions and find the feeble-minded mixed with abnormally bright; the hardened offender with the sensitive child who has gotten into trouble for the first time, the sex pervert with the child who is mentally ill, the physically and glandularly defective with the healthy.

There are no judicial standards for commitment. Of two children who have committed roughly the same offense, a child in one county is sent to the orphanage at Pryor, a child in another is sent to the training school at Tecumseh.

There is no adequate classification system in any of the institutions. Boys and girls of all ages and all types of personality disorders find themselves grouped together. Groupings on the basis of personality characteristics, vocational aptitudes, intellectual level and cultural background, common today in children's institutions in many states, are not practiced in Oklahoma.

**3—Educational Program.** All the institutions for delinquents are referred to as "schools." A greater euphemism was seldom perpetrated.

While most of the institutions have school programs through the eighth grade, the majority violate standards set by the National Conference on Prevention and Control of Delinquency which require every child up to the age of 16 in an institution to attend a full day of school. One institution has the children attend every other day, another for three hours each day. Only a handful of children of highschool age attend secondary school.

**4—Vocational Training.** It is important that these children, temporarily cast out of society, learn a trade with which they may possibly earn a place in the esteem of society.

Before touring the state institutions, I read a report of the Kerr administration which outlined a vocational training program supposedly in effect in all the institutions. I found no physical evidence of such a program.

At none of the schools is there a vocational director who can study the individual needs of the child and recommend proper trade training. At several, the handyman or carpenter serves as

the teacher. Bulk of the so-called vocational equipment is run down, and what there is is limited to three or four trades.

The vocational training program lacks continuity. Under one administration, one school started an expensive program in welding. Now, the equipment is gathering dust. Under one administration, a \$20,000 dairy barn was built at the girls training school to teach the inmates how to milk cows. Now the barn is gathering cobwebs, without a cow and without a girl.

**5—Staff.** Inadequacy of staffs is probably the greatest single problem of Oklahoma's children's institutions, with a handful of workers trying to carry on jobs many times too big for them. The Child Welfare League of America recently put out a set of minimal staff standards based upon an institution of 100 children with five cottages housing 20 children each. It includes an executive, social worker, secretary-stenographer, registered nurse, recreation leader, librarian, accountant, dietitian, buyer of goods, storekeeper, night watchman, mechanic, five housemothers, five assistant housemothers or cooks, and two and a half substitute workers.

**6—Staff Qualifications.** In recent years with increased emphasis upon individuality, there has been a heartening trend toward employment of relatively young professional workers to handle the job of planning child rehabilitation.

A recent survey by the Russell Sage Foundation of 470 housemothers employed in children's institutions in various parts of the country showed 91 of them to be college graduates, 99 to have had two or more years of college training, 39 normal school graduates, 26 school of nursing graduates, and 185 high school graduates. The educational qualifications of housemothers in Oklahoma institutions are far short of this level.

In my survey of Oklahoma institutions, I discovered how dangerous it is to have a housemother in charge of children who has no knowledge of modern child behavior studies. In one ward of 40 boys, a housemother explained to me she had 20 bed-wetters, many of them older boys. I asked her how she treated this. She told me she punished the boys severely. Later, in talking to the boys individually, I discovered the reason—they were all terrified.

A housemother is the backbone of a children's institution. Merely having the qualifications of a good domestic servant hardly fits her for the delicate task of shaping the lives and futures of 30 or 40 boys.

**7—Staff Conditions.** Personnel in children's institutions have poorer working conditions than their fellows in mental hospitals. Trained help avoids these institutions like the plague! Not only is the 12-hour day the rule, but at several institutions housemothers put in a back-breaking 24-hour-day.

Until the present administration came in, workers at the largest boys training school did not get a day off during the entire year! Now they are given three days off a month.

Salaries are low. Housemothers average from \$75 to \$125 a month. They are usually quartered in a room in the dormitory which they supervise.

The pay of top executives in the institutions is little better. Top superintendent's pay at any of the institutions is \$330 a month, dropping down to \$250 a month at Tecumseh. In view of these salaries, it is a minor miracle that the present administration has been able to attract an excellent group of superintendents.

**8—Sex Problems.** Existence of a large amount of sex perversion at all children's institutions in the state has been proven beyond doubt, despite the attitude of several superintendents in looking the other way when it is mentioned.

The main reason for it, of course, is the unnatural isolation in which these children live. Authority after authority has found impressive testimony showing that such institutions foster this type of activity.

Prof. Alfred C. Kinsey, author of "Sex Behavior in the Human Male," who made an extensive study of sex problems in Children's institutions, writes:

"If an evil genius were intent on creating an abnormal environment designed to check wholesome development, he might dream up the typical state training school to accomplish his ends."

The situation is not helped in Oklahoma by supervisory personnel who take a moral attitude toward sexual indiscretions, attempting "to beat it out of them." These children need psychological and medical counsel, not beatings and moralizings.

**9—Discipline.** Although severe brutalities practiced widely in institutions in other states are found rarely in Oklahoma, there has been too much corporal punishment in the governing of children. The present administration is making an effort to wipe out the more indefensible practices; for example, at Helena the rockpile has gone out, boys who have escaped no longer have their heads shaved and have to wear girls' dresses, and enforced military drill has been halted.

However, discipline has never been used consistently in Oklahoma's institutions. Each administration brings in its own forms. Under one it is the rockpile, under the next "the little white jail," under the next the heavy board with the holes in it.

There are those so-called realists who maintain the only way to make a child behave in an institution is to beat him into submission. The testimony of every national expert in the field refutes this.

I asked one housemother at one of the institutions, known for her whippings of her charges, why she continually found it necessary to resort to force.

"Why," she replied indignantly, "they are all used to it. That's all they got in their homes."

What perfect proof of the failure of force! They had been beaten at home; it had proved so successful a method they are now inmates in an institution for juvenile delinquents.

The better training schools in the country, as the National Conference on Prevention and Control of Delinquency points out, have developed programs so that desirable conduct is motivated through positive means. Withholding of privileges is ten times more effective than the use of the switch.

**10—Medical, Psychiatric and Psychological Services.** Here again the Oklahoma institutions are near the bottom of the list. At several of the institutions, children are admitted to wards without going through a period of quarantine necessary to check for contagious diseases, lice and infections.

There is not one reception center in the state where children can be studied before they are committed. Progressive states have set up diagnostic centers where every child committed by a court is given complete physical, psychological and psychiatric examinations, in addition to vocational achievement, aptitude and personality tests. Then, after four to six weeks of intensive study, the child is committed to the institution best suited to his needs. Not in Oklahoma.

**11—Social Work.** At better training schools, the social case work department is the key to the program of the entire institution. This department has made many major functions, among them working closely with the parents, with the individual children, and in the supervision of children during a period of aftercare following release.

A child in an institution is like a fighter with no one in his corner; he's being pushed around and has no one to turn to for help. The staff social worker is the child's manager; in addition to giving him constant vocational and personal advice, she stands as his interpreter and advocate to his house-mother, parents, teacher, physician and even to his playmates.

Yet in Oklahoma there isn't a single social worker at any of the children's institutions. One of the consequences of this neglect is the absence of an adequate case history on any of the thousand children confined in these places. What caused the child to be brought to the institution, family background, physical, mental and emotional background of the individual child? You can ask these questions but you won't find the answers in any case records.

**12—Placement Procedures.** One searches in vain for any standards for the discharge of children from the training schools. Arbitrary rules about it change from one administration to the next. For instance, under the regime of Col. Downs at Helena, for some mysterious reason every boy got the impression he was undergoing a seven-month sentence. Those who served that and were not discharged are real problem children of the state today. Of seven boys I talked to in the detention cell at Helena, four said they ran away to see Gov. Turner to protest their illegal commitment beyond the seven-month period.

How about proper placement of the child in the community? It is made impossible because there is no study and screening at the point of intake, and no program for individual rehabilitation during the child's stay in the institution. As to supervision of the child after he is returned to the community, here are the standards laid down by the Child Welfare League of America:

"The duration of supervision after return to the child's own home should be determined by the conditions in each case. During this period the institution should give such assistance as may be necessary in readjusting the child to life in his own home and providing for

his education, vocational preparation, suitable employment and recreational needs."

They are not followed in this state. Children rattle around from one institution to another. One boy I talked to was first committed to the orphanage at Pryor, then sent home, then to Helena, then back home, then back to Pryor, and was back at Helena when I talked to him.

**13—Age Factors.** One of the most heartbreaking sights at the orphanages at Pryor and Taft is the number of infants and small children under six. Because of severe personnel shortages, it is impossible to give these youngsters the intensive personal and medical care they need.

In "Standards for Children's Organizations Providing Foster Family Care," the following unequivocal principle is laid down:

"It is desirable that all children under six should be placed in foster homes . . . Babies and children of two and three years should not be cared for in institutions, except as a temporary measure, and then only if the quality of care given them equals the medical safeguards of a high grade children's hospital."

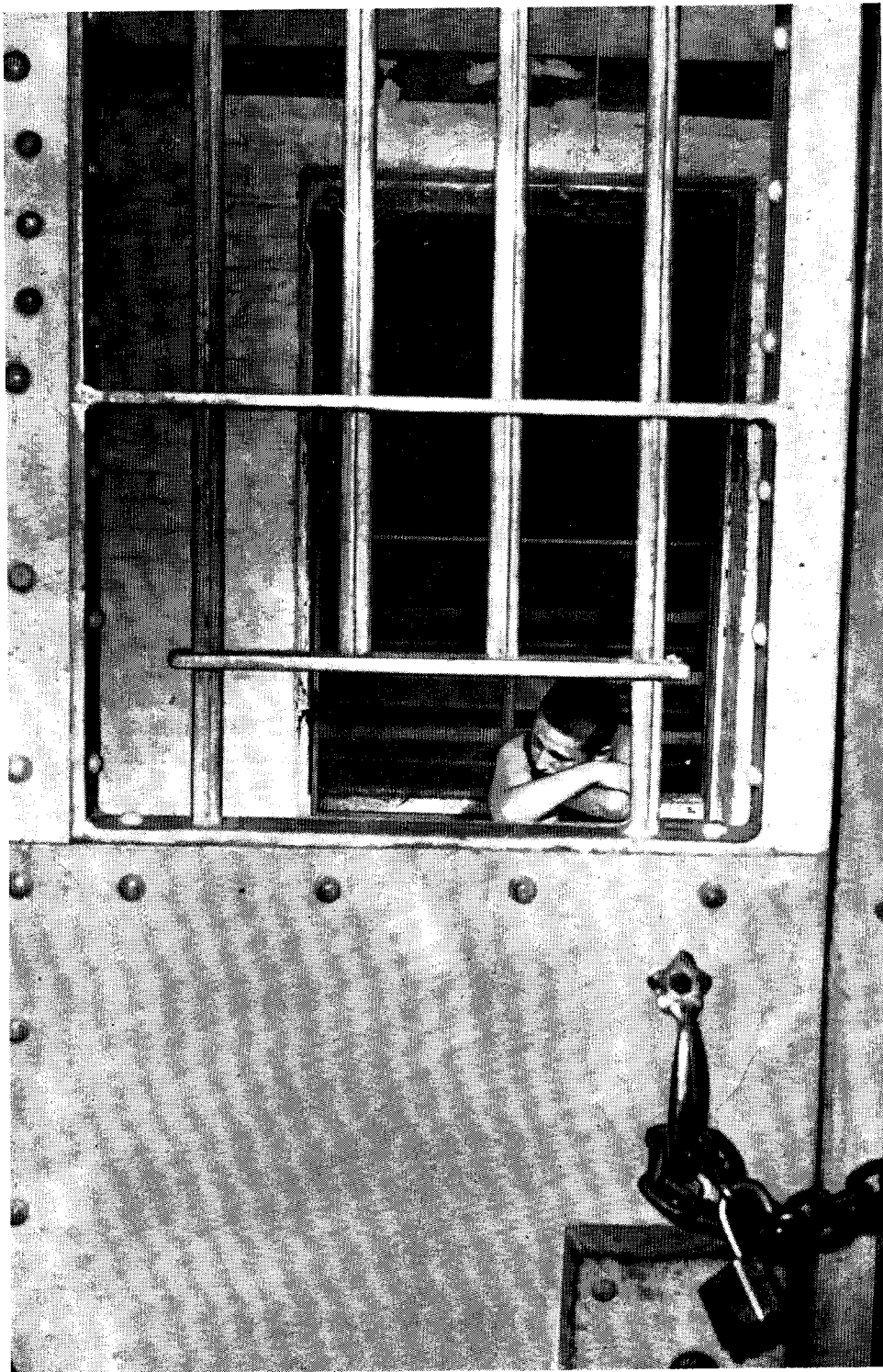
**14—Physical Facilities.** A number of the buildings are obsolete; toilet facilities are bad; cracks in the walls, holes in the floor and general ugliness pervade the majority of the institutions.

The modern standard for children's institutions is 20 to a cottage, classified as to age and personality. At Boley, 140 boys are jammed into one steaming hot dormitory. The situation at the other institutions is little better.

The above are major deficiencies encountered in a survey of Oklahoma's institutions for the delinquent, the neglected and the dependent. Placed black upon white as statistics, they do little to suggest the human heartbreak which is their consequence.

In sum, Oklahoma's institutions for children today belie the name of "state training schools." From the time he is thrown back into the community with no thought of his aftercare, he is a victim of a mass-custodial system which does nothing to change his behavior patterns.

The consequences to society should be obvious. When these children are finally released, the majority of them embark on a bitter war with society which costs the community incredible amounts of money and effort.



*The barred and locked detention cell at Stringtown.*



# STRINGTOWN

## THE STATE TRAINING SCHOOL FOR WHITE BOYS

THE State Training School for White Boys, which houses 148 delinquent children in the 10 to 18 age range, up until a few weeks ago occupied a set of old buildings 12 miles from the city of Helena. It has since been moved and set up at Stringtown. It was moved from its former site at Pauls Valley in 1946 to make way for the State Hospital for Epileptics. Pauls Valley had some good farming land, and the boys got a token amount of agricultural training. Helena is wheat country, and there was little opportunity for farm training. The fertile Pauls Valley farmland is unused now, since the epileptics are unable to farm it.

Both in its Pauls Valley and Helena locations, the boys' training school has been a political pawn. In three years, it has had three administrations, with three varying philosophies.

Under Col. Walter E. Downs, a Kerr appointee, the school was an ersatz military camp. The colonel, a great believer in things military, liked to get the boys out of an evening for a snappy two-hour military drill. He sent bad boys to the rock-pile where they made little ones out of big ones. I talked to an orphan at Pryor who had worked on the rock-pile at Helena when he was 10 years old. He was so afraid of adults he burst into tears at the slightest provocation.

Next came Thomas Forsythe, who abolished the rock-pile, put an end to military training, and practically terminated formal schooling.

I paid an unannounced visit to Helena in March; every building on the grounds seemed swamped with dirt, broken boards, filthy rags, misplaced wires, etc.

Although lax in some matters of discipline, Forsythe exercised his own peculiar brand of punishment. When a boy who ran away was returned to Helena, his head was shaved, except for a little patch in the center. Forsythe also made the escapee put on a dress and wear it for an indeterminate length of time.

Details of the sex perversions rampant under the Forsythe regime are too sordid for publication. Older boys roamed the place in gangs, forcing their attentions on the little boys. I talked to more than 20 boys who were scarred by these experiences.

Forsythe resigned in April. To succeed him Gov. Turner appointed Lee Ford, then chief clerk at McAlester.

FORD, who recently resigned, has been succeeded by W. T. Smith. Smith, formerly chief of police at Guthrie, is the third superintendent to have a whack at the training school under the Turner administration.

The job that Ford had done in the past six months in cleaning up Helena is little short of miraculous. Dr. William D. Lemmon, director of the University of Oklahoma mobile psychological unit, has gone on record as saying the morale of the children had improved 100 per cent under Ford.

Ford and his staff spent several months just cleaning up the dirt. In the course of checking up he discovered 32 children of grade school age who were not attending the institution school. Medical services were inefficient; he found five boys were suffering from bad hernias, 11 with swollen tonsils, two with swollen adenoids, and countless others with infections. He rushed the operable cases to the Western Oklahoma hospital at Clinton; others were taken care of locally.

### *Facilities Are in Bad Repair*

Despite his efforts, Ford could run nothing but a mass-custodial institution, due to staff shortages and plant inadequacies. Ford, who gave much thought to the problem, admits he was not rehabilitating the youngsters the way he wanted to; he fervently hopes the state will give Smith man-power to do the job.

One of his greatest handicaps is the run-down plant. He smiles wearily when reminded of minimal standards which prescribe but 20 boys to each cottage. He has three old dormitories, one of which is jammed tight with two companies of older boys.

Many of the beds in the dormitories are double-decked. The floors are bare, the walls badly in need of paint. Everywhere the plumbing is in need of repairs; the visitor is continually aware of the pit-pat of leaking pipes. Toilet facilities are both inadequate and filthy. One company of 23 boys has but one commode. Not enough bathtubs, not enough showers, not enough towels.

THE so-called dormitory dayrooms or playrooms usually consist of a bare wooden table and a couple of long, hard benches. The dormitory for the younger children in the 10 to 14 age range is a shameful living place for kids whose every experience is making an indelible mark on them. On the hot July morning I visited it, more than 30 were jammed together on benches in the dayroom. The toilet facilities adjoining the room emitted a nasty stench. Outside on the dormitory steps a blue-eyed youngster of 12, who had arrived at Helena a week before, sobbed uncontrollably.

The manual training building, the pride and joy of progressive children's institutions, was a melange of miscellaneous "equipment" housed in one of the most obsolete structures on the grounds. The "library" was actually a battered wooden table and two dirty chairs. The dog-eared volumes included an eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica published about a generation ago, a "History of the World," apparently published while Methuselah was still living, and a scattering of volumes which were obviously discards.

Staff shortages are severe. There are 10 full-time housefathers. They average \$100 a month plus maintenance, and most of them are quartered in single dormitory rooms. When Ford took over, they were working without a single day off during the entire year. They put in a 12-hour day in exacting, nerve-racking work.

### *Younger Men Are Helping*

The new superintendent has done a remarkable job in attracting younger personnel to the institution. He managed to recruit three boys in their early 20s, all of them with some college training, as housefathers.

The cook is a young man of 23. He is paid \$125 a month plus maintenance, for which he works a 13-hour day. There is no assistant cook. When Ford came, the cook hadn't had a day off in months; he now gets three days off a month. He runs the scout troop at the school in his spare (?) time.

Medical services are poor. An elderly doctor comes in from Helena on call. There is no quarantine set up for new boys.

At progressive institutions there is an isolation unit where entrants spend several weeks undergoing physical checkups and immunization shots. At Helena, new boys are thrown right into the dormitory with the rest. Many of

them have lice, skin infections and other diseases.

New workers are not given a physical examination—not even a Wasserman—before starting work.

The so-called "hospital" is in reality a small clinic where a practical nurse administers simple medications. Although not a graduate nurse, she is a hard worker.

The formal school setup, while far from adequate, is a vast improvement over that under previous administrations. Children go to school a half-day five days a week, as against national minimal standards of a full five-day school week. The school is operated under the Helena school system, with classes taught up through the tenth grade. Wilbur Wilks, the principal, is hard-working and competent, and he has four teachers on his staff.

### *Specialized Training Is Needed*

The major failure of the State Training School for White Boys, now located at Stringtown after its recent switch from Helena, lies in its inability to provide specialized training for backward pupils.

Most of the delinquent children committed to these institutions have had little formal schooling; the second, third and fourth grades are filled with boys 14, 15 and 16 years of age. One boy I talked to, who was in the second grade, had a wife and two children.

These youngsters cannot absorb a lot of the regular curriculum. They need simplified visual education, remedial reading courses, and so on. Mrs. Wilks, wife of the principal, has tried to help the retarded boys.

Greatest single deficiency of the Helena institution is its weak vocational training program. There is no full-time vocational director, and seemingly no direction to the program.

The manual training program is supervised by the institution maintenance man. The standard shops found in so many institutions—shoe repair, tailoring, printing, and countless others—are lacking there.

Under the Kerr administration, an elaborate \$40,000 vocational building was constructed. Col. Downs, the superintendent then, decided to put in a complete welding course. He hired an instructor at \$220 a month, and additional equipment cost the state \$350 a month. The sumptuous elephant brought forth a mouse. Only five or six boys took welding, while the rest of them went begging for other vocational equipment.

Forsythe continued the program, but Ford bounced it soon after his arrival.

"I just couldn't see the sense in using a \$40,000 building to train five or six boys in an occupation which isn't one-tenth as useful in Oklahoma as any of 10 or 15 other vocations," Ford told me. "Besides, that program alone was costing us close to \$600 a month—almost enough to pay three good instructors in other lines."

So the \$40,00 building stands in magnificent idleness today.

**F**ORSYTHE at one time decided to do some custom-work for farmers in the neighborhood. He hustled up \$1,500 worth of orders to paint farmers' trucks. He neglected just one item—when the trucks rolled up to the building to be painted, he discovered the doors weren't wide enough to allow them to be wheeled into the shop.

The clothing situation is a lot better since Ford took over. Then, none of the boys had summer underwear; they were all going around in long woolies. Ford worked out a deal whereby the girls at Tecumseh made 340 sets of shorts. Outer clothing of the boys consists of blue denims, obtained from the penitentiary, and khaki shirts.

In looking through the case "histories" on these boys, I was appalled by the meagre information they contained. A number of files merely held the order of commitment which ran as follows:

"In the matter of the delinquent child, John Jones, the State of Oklahoma to the State Training School for Boys. Now on the 16th day of July the above entitled cause coming on to be heard upon the duly verified petition of Harry Brown, said petitioner charging that said John Jones is a delinquent child, and the Court having heard the evidence introduced in said case and being fully advised in the premises, finds that said John Jones is a delinquent child.

"Whereof, it is ordered that John Jones be committed to Helena unit until he reaches the age of 21, unless sooner reformed."

Nothing on the family background of John Jones, his schooling, mental level, previous arrests if any, physical condition, nature of his delinquent acts, and so on.

Many commitments to the training school seem completely unjustified, yet Ford is forced to take them because of a court order. Many are merely neglected children the county has made no attempt to handle. A number are orphans who have run away from orphanages. A number are obviously

feeble-minded. One reason they are not sent to Enid is because some counties don't want to contribute to the support of the children at Enid; it's free at Helena.

There is no attempt at an adequate classification system, a separation of the boys into personality groups based upon their emotional and schooling needs. This eliminates the possibility of any rehabilitation program, since it must be based upon the needs and objectives of each individual boy. The boys receive no psychiatric or psychological examinations, this in spite of the fact there are a number of boys at Helena who are severe emotional cases, many of them mentally ill.

Boys who run away or commit serious infractions of the rules are put in a detention cottage which is a mighty rough spot. There are bars on the windows, and the iron door to the cottage is kept locked at all times.

I asked to be allowed to go into the cell for a visit with these "hardened criminals." There were seven of them in one cell-like cottage whose dimensions were a little bigger than the average room.

After an hour's visit with them I went away with the impression they were pretty average kids. Out of the seven, four said they ran away because their time was up. I asked them why they thought that.

"Colonel Downs told us we had to serve only a seven-month sentence," they replied. "We've been here a year and a half and two years. We tried to get to the Governor and tell him what they were doing to us."

### *Rough Punishment Is Abandoned*

Several of the boys had tears in their eyes as they told their stories to me. I asked them if they would run away again as soon as they got out of detention. They didn't answer.

Ford has cut out a lot of the old rough stuff, replacing it with punishment through withdrawal of swimming, movies and other rewards. The kids all like Ford, but they resent several of the old-line supervisors who still lean heavily on corporal punishment. Too many of them bear scars inflicted by beatings in former administrations.

I talked to one of the housefathers singled out by the kids as a "tough cookie." A former filling station operator he had come to Helena because "I was out of a job and I like guard work." I asked him why he found it necessary to use the strap so much,

and why it was necessary to wallop several kids across the face.

"These kids are plenty tough, mister," he answered. "If you throw the straps away, they'll take over the place."

**T**HE superintendent of one children's institution says this:

"Corporal punishment is too dangerous. Too few people are blessed with enough judgment to use it. Those so blessed won't need it."

The monitor system is prevalent at Stringtown. Under this system, better boys are put in charge as auxiliary company leaders and on key details. This causes resentment. The thing the boys most resented about being in detention was the fact one of their own was the guard who watched over them.

The ticklish problem of sex misdemeanors still plagues the institution, although Ford did a lot to wipe it out.

One of the most severe problems is that of placement of these boys after release. Ford made an honest effort to return some of these boys to the community, but he was stymied every which way he turned.

In the first place, he had no social workers to study the children, the home situation, schooling, and so on. Most of the children have lost contact with their home situations. The parents are not informed of the child's progress, nor is the child kept aware of conditions at home. If you think this situation isn't damaging to children, just talk to a few of them who haven't heard from home in months. Their bitterness, their sense of rejection, their feeling of "aloneness against the world" is impossible to describe.

Secondly, there is no study of the child's potentialities when he enters the institution. Consequently what "training" there is, instead of being pointed toward a special objective in the community, lacks all direction.

Thirdly, a number of communities are completely indifferent to the problem of the relocation of these children. A minority of judges, when they sentence "the little criminals" to Helena, seem to feel they've disposed of them until they are 21. They return requests for parole with a firm notation that the child hasn't served out his sentence yet.

### *What the Children Have to Say*

Why should the children at the state training school for white boys at Stringtown, want to go home? Aren't they happy in an institution where they have three meals a day, a place to sleep, and a good deal of kindness? Let's talk to

some of the children I visited during my two days at Helena.

**J**ACK is 16, although he has the build of a 10-year-old. He has a large cretin-like head—he suffers from a glandular deficiency.

He doesn't remember his father—his mother told him the father abandoned Jack and his three brothers when they were very young. His mother got a divorce in 1940, had several children, then married a Mexican.

The step-father and Jack didn't get along. Jack called him a "drunk." He said he was kicked out of the house several times. He would roam around for a few days, bumming food here and there, then when he was exhausted he would come home again.

At the age of 9, Jack started picking up things which didn't belong to him.

In 1941 he was picked up on a burglary charge and committed to the state training school for boys, then at Pauls Valley. When he got there, it was discovered he was under the legal age for commitment, so he was transferred to the orphanage at Pryor. He told me he liked it at Pryor.

"It was nice there," he said. "They let you go to the movies with your girl friend almost every night."

But Jackie was a restless boy. He ran off from the orphanage and went back home. He stole some more. One time he and another boy broke into a gas station and rifled the cash register. Jackie took the money and flushed it down the toilet.

"I did it because I didn't want my mother to get it," he said. "She always wanted everything I stole."

He was picked up and sent to Pauls Valley, then went to Helena with the transfer of the institution. He didn't like it under Col. Downs.

However, he behaved himself pretty well and was paroled in May, 1947. There was no one there to take him home, so he got on a train going to Kansas City. Looking around for something to do, he started stealing things out of passengers' luggage.

"I was having lots of fun," he said. "I almost drove the conductor crazy."

He was placed in the Mohawk Receiving Home for Boys in Tulsa. Looking around for something to do, he robbed the superintendent's apartment. The superintendent called to have Jack's mother come and get him. She said she was too busy—she was going on a vacation. Jack was sent to Helena.

Under the Forsythe regime, Jack got in with a group of sex offenders. When

asked if he was still running around with any of the old gang, Jack shook his head.

On the day I talked to Jack, he was very sad. He's a nice looking boy, with big eyes and an engaging smile. He said he wasn't feeling good because yesterday had been his birthday and his mother hadn't been to see him. He said she'd only been to see him four times in three years.

Jackie looked very thoughtful when I asked him what he wanted to do when he was discharged. He said he didn't think he could get along with his step-father, so he'd like to go on a ranch somewhere and work. He loves horses—he said his ambition was to be a jockey.

That, briefly, is the history of Jackie up to now. From the time he was 4 years of age, he's been pretty much on his own. At the age of 9, he got fouled up with the law for the first time. Yet, in all the seven years he's been institutionalized, has there ever been an attempt to understand Jackie, to examine him and try to straighten him out?

In February, 1948, the mobile psychological unit of the University of Oklahoma studied Jackie. In their report, they point out he needs medical and psychiatric treatment, that he suffers from delusions and hallucinations. Is Jackie being treated? At Helena? No.

**T**HOMAS, 15 an Oklahoma City boy, presents a different problem. He was born on W. Washington street. His father is living, but he doesn't know where he is. His mother is a bartender. His mother told him his father left home two weeks before Thomas was born.

He was first committed to training school in September, 1945. He's escaped several times, been paroled and returned. He's been placed in detention several times—for fighting and for walking off a detail. Thomas is pretty mad at the world; he told me all the supervisors hated him.

The mobile psychological unit, after examining him, described him as a "psychiatric deviant." This is an important term to understand, since it describes so many boys at Stringtown. A psychiatric deviant is not feeble-minded; in many cases, he's above normal intelligence. Nor is he mentally ill or psychotic; he is in full possession of his faculties and is making what he thinks is a realistic adjustment.

His distinguishing characteristic is a warped personality, a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude toward everyone. He's been beaten about so much he has lost

all the normal emotions. He's afraid to show affection; he's been rejected so many times he doesn't want to get burned any more. After a number of years of being ground down in institutional routine, his personality freezes into a twisted snarl at everyone. Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists say very little can be done with this type of personality unless its deviations are caught early enough.

**Y**ET at least one person has tried to understand Thomas. After his last escape, Marion Russell, an assistant juvenile officer attached to the Oklahoma county court, wrote:

"I had a long talk with Thomas after he had quieted down after he was picked up and I can see how he feels about his stay in Helena. I think the whole situation has come from the various changes in administration while he has been there. He says that Col. Downs told him he would be released at the end of one term of one year. Mr. Forsythe came in and told him as soon as he finished welding, he would be released. He finished this, then Ford came in and the rules changed again. Then he got disgusted and ran off."

Sonny presents a tough problem. He comes from a broken home, like 90 percent of his fellow inmates. After his father ran off, his mother, a sickly woman, couldn't care for him properly.

He was committed in November, 1945. He hated institutional life, and from the first was a problem child. He ran off a number of times, and the length of his sentence was extended until its expiration date is now May 24, 1949.

Yet Sonny isn't a bad boy at heart. He wants desperately to go home—he is always writing to his family. His father has straightened out since Sonny's commitment, and now has a good job as a welder.

### *A Letter From His Mother*

His mother writes pleading letters to the board of affairs and the superintendent at Helena asking for his release. Here is an excerpt from a recent one:

"I wish to state in the very beginning that the little rascal of a boy, my son, is very dear to me; more so, I believe, because due to my state of health and ill temper, I feel that I am very much responsible for the actions of Sonny. I tried to have a facial scar removed, to no avail, for Sonny's sake. Once he told me I was ugly (I don't care if I am personally) but for the boy's sake I worry. He was always in the leading role in school plays. He's a good boy..."

On the Sunday I was there, his father visited Ford and pleaded for Sonny's release. Ford, a kindly man, would like to see Sonny given another chance, but there's a little document from the county judge who committed Sonny which reads:

"Our suggestion for parole, only after he reaches 16, is with the idea that if he is again charged and convicted of burglary, he will be amenable to the general criminal laws."

Sonny is a confused, heartsick boy.

**D**AN, 17, is the classic psychiatric deviant, completely at war with society yet Ford is optimistic about his recent change in attitude.

Dan's father abandoned his five children when they were very young. Dan was committed on a burglary charge in February, 1946.

He's had a rough go of it since he's been institutionalized. He ran off twice under Col. Downs and spent nine months in a filthy detention cell. He also worked long hours on the rock pile, and when it got too cold for that, he was assigned to cleaning out sewers.

Under the Forsythe regime, he once stood at attention for 17 hours.

"Somebody turned the arclight off while a guy was welding," he told me "All of us had to stand at attention for 17 hours. Several of the guys fainted."

He also got a number of beatings from guards. He described one big Indian who used to get drunk and work the boys over with a ball bat. He said he wasn't involved in any of the sexual rings under Forsythe, but said "the place was run by a bunch of queers."

In his file there is a letter from an older sister, written to Forsythe. Here's an excerpt:

"He's just a kid whose home has been broken up since he was quite small. But, Mister, you don't understand how deep down in his heart he has longed for love of brother, father and mother. My mother worked hard and gave us security but she could not be home with us to give us love, what every child needs. Believe me, I'm a grown woman and married, but somehow nothing ever makes up for those things. There is a deep hurt you carry for the rest of your life."

Dan's father, who has straightened up in recent years, wants the boy back with him. He's a successful contractor now, and he got his neighbors to sign a petition as to his sobriety and industry.

I asked Dan if he wasn't excited about going back with his father. He looked at me like I was crazy.

"Look, buddy, where's he been all these years I been doin' time," he answered me. "Sure I'll go back with him if he gives me a buck a day and a good flop. But I gotta' look out for number one, and that don't mean my old lady, girls, or anyone but yours truly."

That's Dan at age 17. The clinical psychologists who have examined him say he's too far gone for effective therapy. Society had better give him a wide berth.

### *Billy Is a Puzzling Case*

The most puzzling case I encountered was an 11-year-old named Billy, a slender, handsome boy who possessed the intelligence and maturity of a grown man.

His home life had been a nightmare. His father would get drunk and come home and beat Billy or his mother.

"I never could understand my father," he told me, looking very thoughtful. "He would do anything to hurt my mother, who was the nicest person in the whole world. He would bring other women home, he would lie to mother about going to work, he would take money from her and go out and get drunk when he was supposed to be working. Sometimes mother would burst into tears or faint."

Billy started running away from home. He was placed in Sunbeam home.

He and two other boys broke out of Sunbeam home. They had some skeleton keys, and they burglarized two homes in Edmond and four in Guthrie before they were caught up with.

Billy is a model inmate at Helena but he wants to go home.

"I'd love to be home with mother," he said, tears in his eyes. "If she'd only divorce father, everything would work out all right. I wish she could understand this."

Remember, Billy is only 11. Life's been pretty hard on him—he isn't thinking about what he wants for next Christmas. He's playing for keeps.

The above are just a few of the cases. Each boy could tell you one equally disturbing.

**T**HE Texas state training school code commission, after a recent inspection of the fine facilities at the training school for boys at Gainesville, much finer than anything Oklahoma has to offer, were asked by the beaming superintendent what they thought of his fine place.

Their collective answer was: "Does it all add up to much from the standpoint of rehabilitation?" Amen!

# TECUMSEH

## THE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



THE industrial School for Girls at Tecumseh, which houses 131 delinquent girls in the 12 to 19 year age range, is the best equipped and physically most attractive of all the children's institutions in the state.

As we drove up to it at 10 a.m. on a Friday morning I noticed that the big iron gate was securely locked. After waiting a few minutes while the guard looked us over, we were ushered onto the grounds. As he swung the gate open I noticed a large morning glory entwined in the bars of each of the portals. A very pleasant touch.

The grounds were beautiful, with fresh flowers abloom everywhere. There seemed to be an unnatural silence—the children's voices, always a dominant element at other institutions, were strangely missing.

Mrs. M. E. Fuller, who has been superintendent of the training school for the past year, greeted us pleasantly and personally conducted us on the tour.

Everything was quiet and precise. The girls wore different colored uniforms denoting the cottage they were living in. When our party walked into a cottage all the girls jumped to attention and stood there as if frozen. On one occasion, while inspecting one cottage, I decided to find out how many times the girls would snap to attention. I popped in and out of the dayroom five times—five times the girls leaped to attention and froze. I asked Mrs. Fuller the reason for this. Wasn't it a little tiresome?

"Oh, no," she replied. "They do it because they want to. It's a sign of respect."

The school building was in excellent shape, with four fine classrooms. Mrs. Fuller said there were three teachers who taught through the eighth grade. I asked about highschool work—there seemed to be a lot of older girls at Tecumseh.

"We give the highschool eligibles typing. That's the most useful."

The hospital was the best I had seen at any of the children's institutions.

*The "Little White Jail House"  
at Tecumseh.*



There were 24 beds and a full-time registered nurse, an elderly woman in charge. She receives \$185 a month.

Mrs. Fuller said the hospital was in frightful shape when she took over. In addition, 33 girls in the cottages had venereal disease, and a number suffered from lice. Mrs. Fuller dispatched all of them off to the hospital. Venereal disease cases were sent to the quick treatment center in Oklahoma City.

New girls are quarantined until they are freed of contagious diseases and given immunization shots. A doctor from Shawnee, paid \$150 a month, comes out almost every day. He gives immunization shots, chest X-rays, and performs needed tonsilectomies. New employees do not receive a physical examination before going to work.

In the basement of the hospital there were a number of small, cell-like rooms for girls receiving treatment for venereal disease. Two were there on the day of our visit. They both stood at attention at the head of their beds as we passed. Their eyes were cast down.

Some of the girls told me later that, at one time, the basement of the hospital was used for disciplinary cases. Straitjackets were kept there and unruly girls were tamed over a period of time.

### *Disciplinary Facilities Adequate*

Everywhere you went on the grounds you ran into disciplinary facilities. In the rear of one cottage there were 10 "meditation" cells. There was just the iron door, the bare floor, and a pallet to sleep on. The cells were about two feet wide.

Then there was "The Little White Jailhouse" which contained an additional three cells. Mrs. Fuller said it hadn't been used in a long time.

The dining hall was very attractive, and the tables furnished with linen and flowers. The girls march into the dining hall, stand at attention, then sit down when Mrs. Fuller pops a bell.

Mrs. Fuller, her son, Marcus, and his wife and a secretary sit at a table in the center of the room. Whenever Mrs. Fuller wants something done she pops that bell. It popped a number of times during that noon meal. She popped it twice for two song numbers which were obediently sung. Then she popped it and the girls marched out—the ones in the red uniforms, the ones in the green uniforms, and the ones in the blue uniforms.

Vocational training leaves much to be desired. There is no vocational director. One woman teaches cosmetology,

typing, and arts and crafts. There is a seamstress in charge of a well-equipped sewing room.

ON the final leg of our journey of inspection we passed the \$20,000 dairy barn constructed under the Kerr administration. Mrs. Fuller shook her head sadly as she surveyed its emptiness.

Our final stop was Staff hall. It comprises a lovely reception room and quarters for most of the employees.

There is a fairly good recreational setup at Tecumseh. While there is no gymnasium (how about the dairy barn?) there is a swimming pool and plenty of space for volley ball, soccer, croquet and so on. There is no full-time recreational director.

After most of a day spent touring the Industrial School for Girls at Tecumseh, I asked Mrs. Fuller if I might speak to a number of the girls alone. She agreed, and I set my typewriter up in the room next to her office.

I talked to four girls in individual interviews. I got absolutely nothing in the way of information out of them. They were tight-lipped, they "yessired" me to death, and they could find nothing wrong with the institution. This was in vivid contrast to my experiences at the other institutions where the kids had opened up and told me stuff straight from the shoulder.

Two clinical psychologists from the University of Oklahoma were with me. After the fourth girl left, they said to me:

"It's no use. All these kids are afraid to talk. They're not personalities—they're automatons."

I decided to try one more girl. I had just started talking to her when the nurse burst into the room.

"You stop what you're doing!" she screamed, pointing a finger at me. "You can't ask these girls any questions about sex."

I was thunderstruck. I explained we were just asking the girls why they were sent to Tecumseh. Then I got a little angry. I asked her how she knew what we were asking the girls. Indignant, she flounced out of the room.

It turned out that, as the girls came out of the room, the nurse pounced on them and grilled them as to the questions asked.

After that outburst, I sat in the room for a few minutes thinking things out. Several chance happenings during the day now began to fit into a pattern.

For example, as we were walking toward the swimming pool in the morn-



ing, Mrs. Fuller had informed me all the girls were required to learn how to swim. She said she had also tried to make all of them take a course in life-saving, but a number weren't interested. "Most of these girls are very selfish," she assured me. "That's why they don't want to take this course in life-saving. They don't care about anyone else but themselves."

I noted, too, that most of the matrons, the nurse and Mrs. Fuller took a highly moral attitude toward sexual indiscretions. They made no attempt to understand them—they merely turned from them in disgust. At one point, Mrs. Fuller said:

"You know, some of the girls used to carve or burn their bodies for sexual thrills. Isn't that awful?"

Her son, Marcus, who teaches scenic design at Vassar College for Women didn't approve of the girls either. I never could figure out what Marcus was doing there at Tecumseh, nor could various reporters from the Shawnee papers who had visited the place. He assured me he wasn't on the state pay roll, but for one who enjoyed no official capacity, he certainly had a lot of authority. At one point, I asked Mrs. Fuller why she tolerated a "monitor" system in which the privileged girls were allowed to dish out discipline to the others. I pointed out all progressive institutions had done away with it, it had caused too much resentment. I asked

her if she had ever thought of instituting a degree of self-government among the children.

Marcus broke in impatiently, looking down his nose at me:

"These girls can't be trusted. If they were to choose leaders, they'd choose the filthiest ones here."

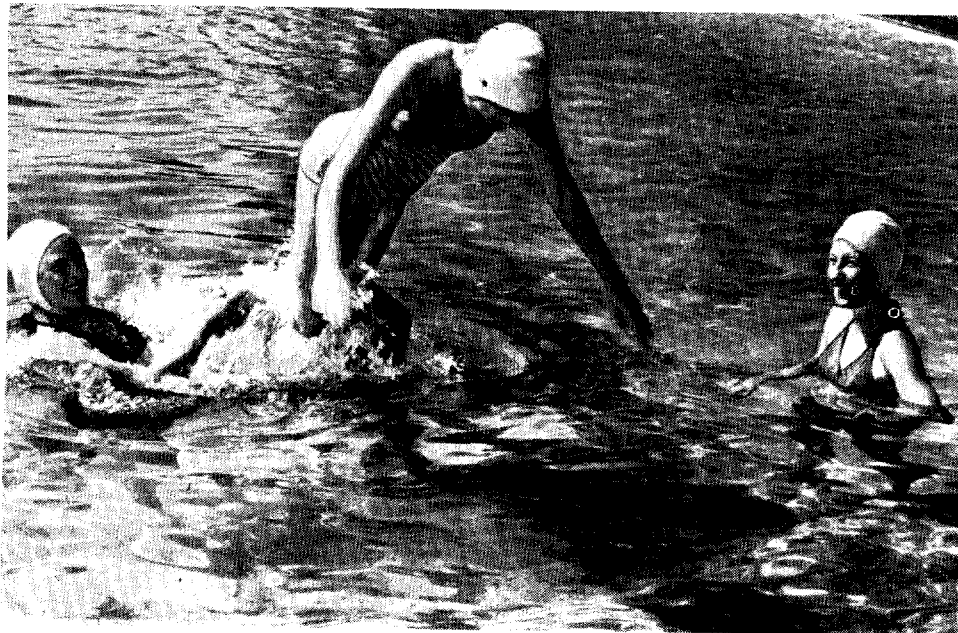
Then the whole business about the locked front gate came back to me. At the time I asked Mrs. Fuller about it, she said it was locked, not to keep the girls from running away, but to keep out sex prowlers from town who might attack the girls.

During the course of the day, she had also expressed her indignation at the number of university psychology and sociology majors who came to Tecumseh to study the children. She assured me a lot of them were "curiosity seekers interested in the sex life of the girls."

THEN later, I asked her if she didn't think some of the more disturbed girls were in need of psychiatric and psychological guidance. I pointed out that Lee Ford, then head of the boys' training school at Helena, was getting a lot of help from the mobile psychological unit of the University of Oklahoma. It had been offered to her, but she had taken no action.

"How can I be sure they won't ask the girls a lot of questions about their sex life?" she replied.

*Girl inmates splash in the outdoor pool at Tecumseh.*



Both Mrs. Fuller and the nurse, the latter enjoying an extraordinary amount of power considering her position, told me they just didn't discuss sex. The girls were told to never discuss it but, as the nurse said: "To forget all about it."

I'd like to quote from a survey of the Los Guillicos School for Girls in California, made when that school exerted the Fuller type of discipline:

"It doesn't require a psychologist to see that, far from healing the psychological wounds which this type of conduct reflects, it would only increase the inner rebellion and push the emotional instability further in the direction of psychosis. Lectures on morality, by themselves would convey about as much meaning and have as much effect as lectures alone on democracy to nazi-trained youths.

"If she is to exert any real influence, the staff member must lose all sense of moral superiority over the girls and shed any appearance of condemnation or condescension toward them."

If Mrs. Fuller thinks she is solving the severe emotional problems of these maladjusted girls by supposedly "regimenting" it out of them, she is sadly mistaken. It has been proved time and time again that this sort of treatment deepens the emotional disturbance, freezing into a bitter hatred of authority and society which will break out at the first provocation.

One more bit of Mrs. Fuller's philosophy. During the course of our conversation, she pointed out she had a number of feeble-minded girls at Tecumseh. She said they should have been sent to Enid; at Tecumseh, they were a lot of trouble to her. She said she thought they should be sterilized.

### *"Wrong People Populate Earth"*

I looked surprised. I asked her on what basis she would sterilize these girls. How did she know they were feeble-minded? Had they been tested psychologically?

"No, they haven't," she replied. "But you can tell the ones who ought to be sterilized. The wrong people are populating the earth."

She amplified her remarks. She said girls from "criminal families" should be sterilized; also girls who had a parent who was mentally ill.

Did she mean to imply, I asked her, that mental illness was inherited, that a predilection for spending time in the penitentiary was inherited? Was she getting up a new theory that delinquents produced delinquents through hereditary effects?

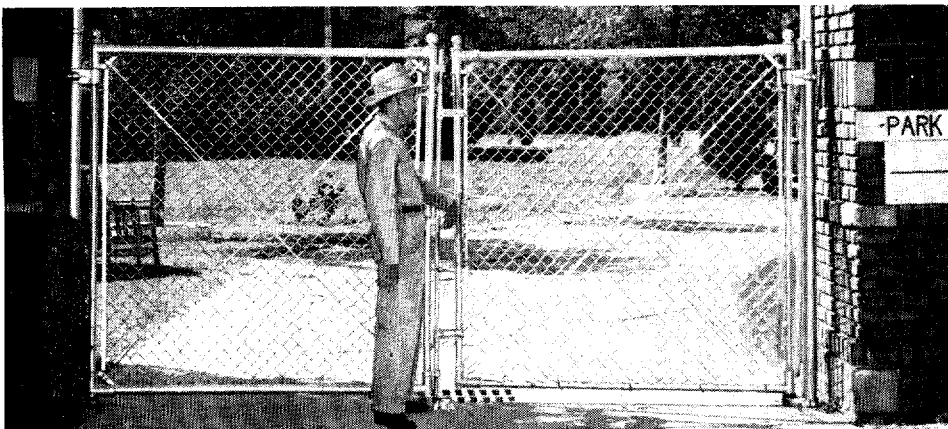
Most of the country's leading psychiatrists would be horrified at this theory. Only in extremely rare cases is mental disease or defect known to be hereditary in character.

She went further. She said she had a number of over-sexed girls — they should be sterilized too.

I asked her on what basis they should be sterilized. I pointed out every expert in the field had demonstrated that sterilization of delinquent girls not only failed to check sex delinquency, but actually encouraged it. It does not remove the sex urge, and it makes the sterilized girl more attractive to certain types of men.

She remained adamant. All of them—the feeble-minded, the over-sexed, the daughters of criminals, the daughters of the mentally ill—all should be sterilized. The wrong people were populating the earth.

*The gate is always locked at Tecumseh.*





**O**UTSIDE the nursery door at the Whittaker State home at Pryor, which houses 368 orphans, there is a sign which blazons the Biblical inscription: "The Lord Is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want."

A noble religious sentiment, but hardly an accurate description of 40 years of neglect of these orphans by successive state legislatures. In fact, it is only fair to state that Whittaker Home, in addition to its technical status as an orphanage, has been treated as an orphan by most Oklahoma political administrations.

In fact, political patronage considerations dictated most staff appointments until the present administration's appointment of Beale McCarty—a college graduate and former highschool principal, as superintendent.

The political sponsor system held full sway, and it has taken its toll in continued poor management of this institution for the orphans.

Those of our politicians who shed tears every campaign year about our "poor, helpless orphans," but who have never given a tinker's damn about the state wards at Pryor, should be led by their demagogic noses on a tour of this run-down institution, the end result of vicious politicking with the fate and welfare of 400 helpless youngsters.

IN cataloguing the physical deficiencies of the plant, it is difficult to know where to begin. Let's start with the nursery for little children, always an appealing sight.

It might be noted, before inspecting it, that every official survey of orphanages has recommended that children under six be placed in foster homes, since it is impossible to give little ones the close personal and medical attention they need in a mass-custodial institution.

There are 23 children under 6 in the nursery, 15 on the boys' side and eight on the girls' side. There are two housemothers to care for them over a 24-hour period; if they divide their duties into two shifts, there is one matron on duty to care for the entire brood. If you think its an easy job being mother to 23 children aged 2 to 6, just spend a half-hour watching one of the matrons go crazy.

There are no toilets on the first floor for these children. When a child has to go to the bathroom, the housemother must drop everything and take the child upstairs. Upstairs are one commode for the boys and one for the girls; emergencies must wait or end in the usual juvenile disaster.

One night a couple of weeks after McCarty had taken over, he made a quick inspection of the nursery. In two of the beds, he found two boys sleeping together. He put an end to that practice.

In addition to youngsters under 6, the institution has seven infants in quarters in one ward of the hospital. The overworked orphanage nurse, who has charge of the hospital and clinic, also must care for these seven infants. No wonder the doctor has told her she must take a rest.

Continuing the tour of cottages you come to Myrtle, which has housed as high as 46 girls aged 6 to 16. There is no toilet on the first floor of the cottage, and only one bathtub on the premises. There are no mirrors in the bathroom, the outside porch leaks all the time, and the beds are jammed close together. Some of them smack hard against the door. If a fire ever broke out in Myrtle, I hate to think what would happen to those girls.

Fern cottage, about 25 years old, looks like a prayer is holding it together. Extending from the cottage is a rickety tin chute which is supposed to be the exit in case of fire. The extinguisher has rusted away, a condition widespread in all of the cottages. For 32 girls there is one bathtub which sits in the center of the lavatory. Every girl using it is

obliged to take a public bath. There are a few small lockers, inadequate for the keeping of personal belongings.

### *Boys' Cottages Are Worse*

The cottages for boys are in even worse shape.

Pine cottage is for the small boys aged 6 to 12. It holds 48 kids at present, about 28 more than it should. There are two bathtubs and two commodes for the whole group. The playroom downstairs is the usual playroom in any one of the children's institutions—a long wooden table and a couple of benches.

Maple, the wooden cottage for older boys, is early American antique. There are holes in the porch, both floors are in complete disrepair, and toilet facilities are disgraceful.

All the children are fed in a mass central dining hall. It is boiling hot in summer, as I can attest after eating there on a hot July day. There are cracks in the floor, the walls are dirty, and the place has a general down-at-the-heels atmosphere.

The central dining hall is an innovation of recent years. For a number of years, girls prepared their own meals in kitchens in the cottages. The individual cottage kitchen is recommended by authorities, who point out it gives the girls valuable training they cannot obtain in the main kitchen.

However, this system was ended a few years ago. One reason given for its discontinuance was careless supervision; housemothers allowed too much waste of food. Whatever the reason, all of the girls' cottages have kitchens which are now in disuse. Again the old story of no continuity of policy.

**M**EDICAL services are poor. There is a full-time nurse who receives \$145 a month. Aside from McCarty and his wife, the nurse is the most overworked person at the institution. She dispenses medications, watches over the infants, and has charge of the meagre isolation ward where newcomers are kept for three days after admission to Pryor. A doctor who comes out from Pryor on call receives \$100 a month.

Although the grounds are attractive, there is no adequate recreational set-up. McCarty, who had done a lot of athletic coaching, wants a man and woman to supervise recreational programs for boys and girls, but his present budget and salary scale make this just another of his many dreams.

The indoor gymnasium is on its last legs. When McCarty took over, he found dead birds and cats on the gym



*One of the pretty babies at Pryor.*

floor. The swimming pool has not been used for five years; McCarty is impatiently awaiting an inspection by the state health department to determine its disposition. There are no shower facilities in the gym.

THE school set-up is far from satisfactory. The school building, like all others on the grounds, is ready for the scrap-heap. The classrooms are sadly in need of repair, and the auditorium needs a new coat of paint, sundry repairs, and an over-all hormone injection.

Classes through the ninth grade are held at the institution. There is need of a skilled kindergarten teacher and more important, a teacher to help the many children who are slow learners and readers.

Vocational training is practically nonexistent, and this is a most serious deficiency in an institution which is theoretically trying to prepare children who have no means of support for a successful role in society.

There is need, first of all, for a vocational building. There is also need for a vocational director and several assistants to handle the instruction of several hundred children.

At present, for the girls there is instruction in cosmetology and sewing. A few of them take a highschool commercial course.

The boys fare most poorly under the weakened vocational set-up. Old-time workers at Pryor told me at one time the placed boasted an elaborate vocational program for the boys, with fine woodwork and other shops. Probably another brainstorm gone down the drain.

A few of the older boys receive some training on the institution farm and at the dairy. That's about the size of it. Essential shops at most progressive orphanages — shoe repair, tailoring, printing, auto mechanics, and so on — are badly needed at Pryor.

### *Staff Is a Major Weakness*

One of the major weaknesses at Whittaker is the size and calibre of the staff.

There are only 12 matrons to handle the large group of children. On the basis of national standards which require a housemother and assistant for every 20 children, Pryor is some 28 matrons short.

Matrons work a 24-hour day, with one day off a week. They are paid from \$75 to \$90 a month. Most of them are quartered in poorly furnished rooms in the dormitory in which they work.

Paying such low salaries and requiring such long hours, the state is unable to attract the type of young, professional worker needed for the sensitive job of bringing up children. With few exceptions, the matrons at Pryor are elderly women with little education and no professional qualifications for the job.

Their attitudes toward the children reflect their lack of technical training. A number of them belong to the harsh punishment school. They made no bones about telling me of their views that the rod and the whip were the only persuaders these children understood.

One of the housemothers had 20 bed-wetters in a cottage holding 35 boys. Clinical psychologists I discussed this with pointed out bed-wetting is a fear reaction on the part of the children.

I asked this housemother how she handled bed-wetters.

"There's only one way, isn't there?" she answered. "I give them a few wallops with the board."

This woman also complained about the "evilness" of her boys, pointing out that a number of them were sex offenders. She said she was hard put to keep them in line.

Later, in talking to some of the boys in her charge, I learned she used to put dresses on them every time they cursed. This had recently been stopped.

**A**NOTHER matron is a religious fanatic.

Until recently, she used to march her charges—little boys 6 to 12—into town for religious services. Some nights they wouldn't get back until 10:30 or 11 o'clock, two hours after curfew. On one occasion, she conducted a mass baptism of 25 of the boys in her cottage. She also compelled the boys to kneel down on the hard wooden floor for an hour at a time during prayer sessions.

She also complained that a number of the boys masturbated; she said she had to use the board on them continually.

In touring the cottages, I ran into a number of odd experiences with some of the other matrons. At one cottage, both the front and back doors were locked. McCarty banged on the front door for ten minutes before we got in. When McCarty upbraided her, she replied sweetly that she didn't know the door was locked.

In several of the other cottages which we inspected after the lunch hour, the children were sleeping on the floor. I asked the matrons in charge why the children weren't sleeping on the beds. Both replied it was the boys' own choice; they would rather sleep on the cool floor than on a hot bed.

Later, in individual interviews with the boys, I asked them point-blank if

they had asked to sleep on the floor. They wouldn't answer me; they fixed their eyes on the floor. Silence is often very eloquent.

As at all the children's institutions, the "sex problem" has been dealt with differently by each administration. Many told me that under previous regimes, boys were punished if they so much as waved at girls across the grounds. All social contacts were forbidden.

McCarty is slowly breaking down this unnatural isolation and separation of the sexes. He realizes what some of the moralists refuse to recognize to this day—in the outside world, social contacts between male and female are pretty routine. On the day I was there, the boys and girls mingled together in the early evening at a watermelon feast.

One of the greatest weaknesses at Pryor is the lack of any social service department at all. Case records on the children are aggravatingly brief. How can there be any individual treatment when each child who comes in is just another robot with no past identity or present assessment of potentialities.

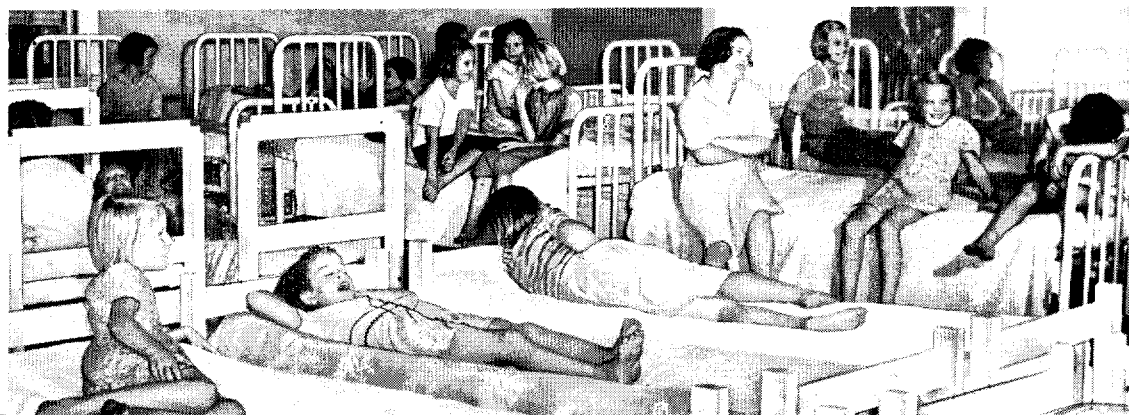
I wish some of the legislators could have been at Pryor the day I was there. That morning, six children from one family had been returned to the institution. The oldest boy was 14, and he has five younger sisters ranging down to four years of age.

I asked to see the records on the children. Their proper ages weren't even on the cards. The only notation was to the effect they had been released to their father's custody on March 22, 1947. The next notation listed their return to Pryor on July 19, 1948.

Why had the children been sent back? Where were their school, medical or vocational records?

Later, I talked to the children in the isolation unit at the hospital. They looked painfully under-nourished. I asked one of the girls a question. She

*One of the overcrowded cottages for girls at Pryor.*





*One of the infants at Pryor.*

tried to answer but burst into tears. All her sisters began to cry. The brother tried manfully to retain his composure. He said he didn't know why they were sent back to Pryor. All of them were puzzled and heartsick.

CASES abound at Pryor of confused children who are given no individual help, who are not even told why they have been institutionalized. In touring one of the cottages, I ran into a pretty, blonde 12-year-old who was sitting off by herself in the dayroom, her eyes wet with tears.

She pleaded with me to tell her why she had been sent to Pryor. She said

she had been very happy living with her aunt. She had 10 brothers and sisters—she didn't know where they were.

"I had a good home, everything I wanted," she cried. "They said I needed some kind of medical treatment. Is that why they brought me here?"

I talked to McCarty about the case. He said the girl had been brought to Pryor by the deputy sheriff of the county. He said a group of neighbors had sworn out a complaint against the aunt, charging that she continually beat the girl.

That puzzled me. Would a child want desperately to go back to a woman who was continually beating her? But the thing that angered me in this, as in so many other cases, was the fact that nothing was ever explained to the children involved. These kids were shunted about like so much unwanted merchandise.

### *There Is No Plan for Their Future*

When these children get ready to go out into the world, what equipment would they have to meet life's challenges? Who was giving them the love and affection they so desperately needed? Many who had been at Pryor five years and more were much more warped than the delinquents. They seemed to react like mechanical dolls—"yes sir, no sir" or just glare at the floor.

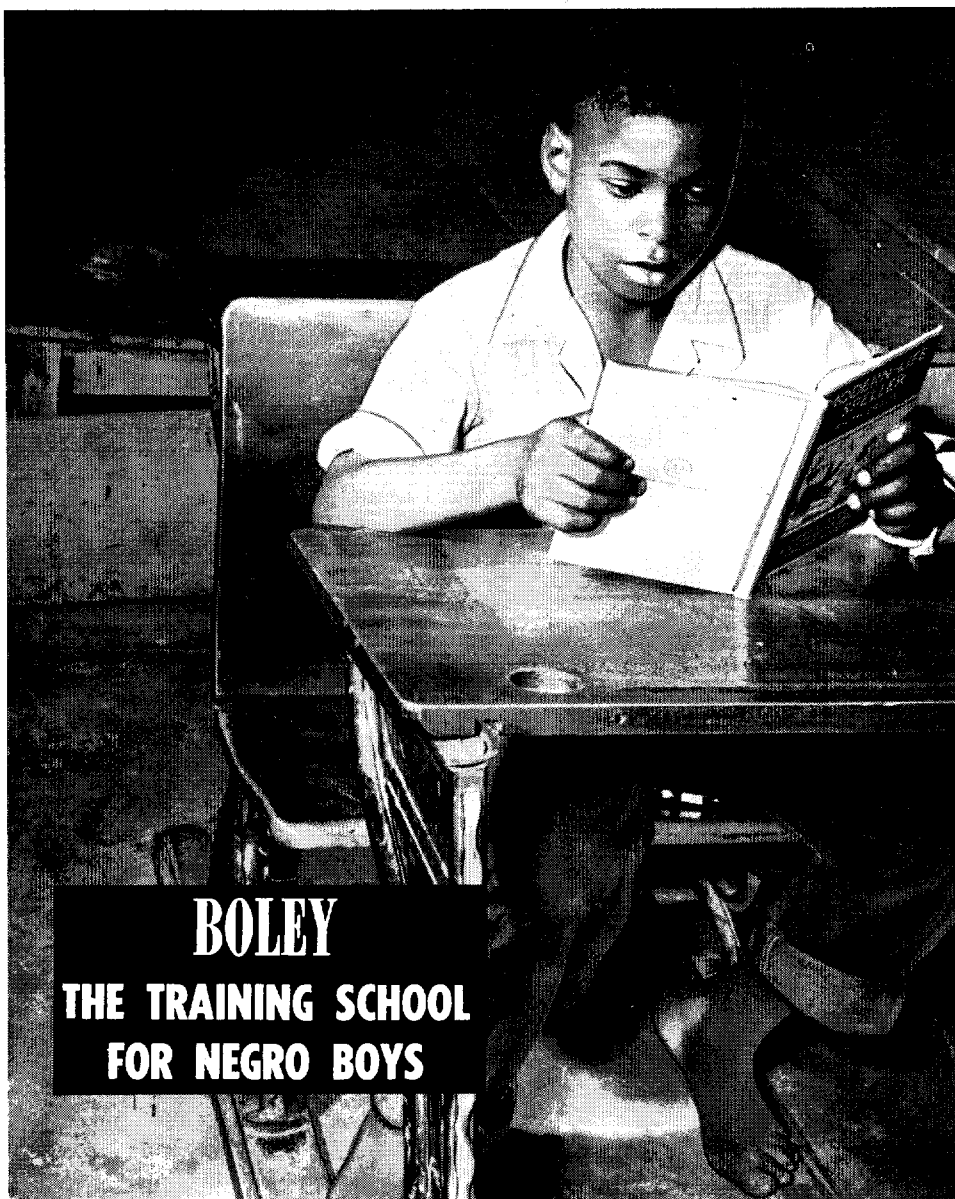
I talked to several of these "mechanical dolls." Helen, 15, is the prettiest girl at Pryor—tawny blonde hair, blue-brown eyes and a fine figure. She was 4 when her mother died; a year later, her father was murdered. She has three sisters.

These are human beings, little children, the so-called "chosen of the earth." They have harmed no one. They are the victims of broken homes, of death, of family tragedy. They need psychological and emotional help, individual attention and affection. How can they grow, develop in an under-financed assembly line such as Pryor.

These are good children, but they cannot successfully survive the rigors of a mass-custodial institution where they are not classified properly, not given the proper educational and vocational rehabilitation, and where no intelligent provisions are made for their aftercare placement.

In the long run they become society's problem—at war with themselves and their environment.





## **BOLEY THE TRAINING SCHOOL FOR NEGRO BOYS**

**T**HE Training School for Negro Boys at Boley is a fine example of "equal" facilities for the Negro.

The 123 boys who are confined there are all jammed into one filthy, two-story dormitory which is the most broken-down building I encountered at any of the 12 institutions I have studied in the past two years.

Thirty of the beds are double-decked, and they are piled so close together you

have to squeeze between them. A number of window panes are broken, most of the screens are badly torn, and on the hot July day I was there, hundreds of flies and mosquitoes made a steaming torture chamber of the place.

There are four commodes for 123 boys.

Into this building are tossed all ages and all classes of offenders—first offenders 9 and 10 years of age, live eat



and sleep together with hardened offenders 19 and 20. You don't have to spell out the consequences of this frightful lack of even the most elementary classification system.

THE rest of the buildings are equally obsolete. The so-called "dayroom," which 123 boys are supposed to use for reading, writing letters and evening games and recreation, is a barnlike structure with a long central table, furniture which must have come from an auction at the close of the Civil War, and broken windows which are an open invitation to flies and mosquitoes.

The manual training building, which is supposed to be the heart of the institution's rehabilitative program, is a nightmare of gashes in the wall, broken windows, discarded plumbing equipment.

The central kitchen and dining hall are on a par with the rest of the buildings, but are superior to them in one respect—the number of flies and mosquitoes per square foot.

The only new building on the grounds is a fine gymnasium, easily the best of its kind in the state. To run it there is a full-time recreation director who is paid \$125 a month.

### *The Laundry Is Excellent*

The legislative investigating committee on institutions will no doubt be interested in the fact there is a fine laundry complete with split steel compartments, a modern wringer, and the latest in mechanical driers. Committees, always more interested in plant accessories than in habitation for the folks the institution is supposed to serve, will be pleased to note that the shirts and pants processed through the laundry receive much better treatment than the delinquent boys processed through the institution.

Medical services for the children at Boley are poor. There is no full-time nurse, it being the only children's institution in the state without one. A doctor from Boley, who is paid \$75 a month, comes on emergency call.

New boys of all ages are placed in the common dormitory without any sort of preliminary examination for infections, lice, contagious or venereal diseases. There is no reception or quarantine system. A number of boys who need medical attention are not receiving it. Furthermore, there is no physical check-up of newly hired employees.

Schooling at Boley leaves much to be desired. A principal and three teachers offer instruction through the eighth

grade. The school building is the worst of its kind at any of the children's institutions in the state. More than 30 years old, it is in a state of collapse from the broken steps which lead up to it to the desolate, filthy auditorium which is its central structure.

There is a great need for specialized and remedial instruction at Boley. More so than the white children, the Negro boys, most of whom come from broken homes, have had little formal schooling. Formal education is of little use to them; they need simplified visual education of the type now being given at the Enid State school.

### *The Staff Is Most Meagre*

The staff is the most meagre of all the training schools. To handle 123 boys, there is a supervisor of boys. He gets \$115 a month. The assistant superintendent, a woman, tries to help him but has many other duties which take up most of her time. The ratio of supervisory personnel to inmates at Boley is the lowest in the state, and would rate near the bottom in national compilations.

The chief cook receives \$90 a month, and his assistant a like sum. There is no dietitian.

The entire staff works a 72-hour week. They receive one day off a week. Living quarters consist of a room in one of the buildings.

There isn't a single school worker at Boley. Case records on the boys are the most inadequate I saw anywhere. Even if a rehabilitation program were set up, its aims would be severely limited because of incomplete data on the physical, mental and social histories of the boys. Records do not even contain full data on the child's family; many of the children I talked to knew little of the whereabouts of their parents, and many did not know how many brothers or sisters they had.

DESPITE the physical inadequacies and staff shortages of the State Training School for Boys at Boley, Maj. H. R. McCormick, the superintendent, is one of the most efficient officials at any of the children's institutions.

He was superintendent of the Deaf, Blind and Orphans Institute and Girls Training school at Taft for seven years before going to Boley in 1943.

When he came to Boley, a gestapo-like discipline was in effect. Beatings were the order of the day. One child was nearly killed in 1940 when a guard fastened a two-by-four around his neck. The big gate was locked at 6 p.m. every

night, and escapees who managed to climb over the fence got a sound working-over.

One of McCormick's first orders was to have the lock on the gate removed. After doing this, he called all the boys in for a little talk.

"I told them the gate would always be unlocked. I said I didn't want to treat them like a bunch of criminals. I said any one of them could probably run off at any time, but I asked them if they thought that would be fair to the rest of the boys at Boley.

"Furthermore, I told them if they ran off I would have to seek them out. When they got back I'd have to be mean to them—I knew they'd been through enough of that already."

### *His Philosophy Has Worked*

His philosophy worked. During his six-year regime, escapees have been at the lowest point in history. Superintendents at several of the other institutions, who lock the children up still get a high escape rate.

He exerts discipline through depriving offenders of recreational activities. This really hurts, since he has developed a fine set of athletic activities on the grounds. On the day I was there, a bunch of the kids were using the swimming pool, others were playing baseball. The few who were being punished were eating their hearts out.

The major also ran into the problem of sex misbehavior when he took over. Gangs of homosexuals swarmed over the place.

"I didn't condemn any of these kids," he told me. "I knew they needed help. I tried to steer their energies into other lines. I started a baseball league—got 'em all steamed up about that. In the winter, a basketball league was formed. That stopped a lot of the nonsense around here."

When McCormick went there, the townspeople of Boley were hostile to the boys at the institution. Kids who escaped, after months of repression, did some wild things in Boley before taking off for the highway.

A few weeks after he took over, the major went in and talked with the townspeople. He told them it was the duty of the community to help these boys, not treat them like lepers.

It was a long, hard fight, and a few of the diehards still aren't convinced, but the co-operation today between the town of Boley and the institution is a model for other cities close to institutions to follow. It is a refreshing con-

trast to the attitude of two other cities close to training schools.

The 30-piece institution band goes to Boley every Saturday to play a concert. Boys who have special privileges go into town unsupervised during the week. Several times a week, a group of boys go down unsupervised to attend a movie in town.

But, despite all his valiant efforts, Maj. McCormick's institution at Boley is doing little to rehabilitate these boys, to give them a place in society, and the major is the first to admit that this is true.

**L**ONG opposed to the jamming of all 123 of his boys in one dormitory, he has pushed hard for a modern system of 20 boys to a cottage. A keen student of institutions in other states, he has spent most of his vacations touring them and studying the workings of the cottage system.

During the 1945 legislative session, he put in a request for eight cottages at a cost of \$20,000 apiece. The board of affairs showed little enthusiasm. In 1947, with building costs rising, he fought hard for eight cottages at \$24,000 apiece. No soap.

With no diagnostic and classification system in the state, McCormick knows he has a lot of boys at Boley who don't belong there—the feeble-minded, the sex perverts, the mentally ill, etc. But he makes the best of it.

He's got a little feeble-minded boy about 9 years old who was committed to Boley for no logical reason. The boy was very unhappy until McCormick figured he might make a kind of assistant to him. Now he uses the youngster as a guide for all visitors to the institution, and the little fellow does a mighty good job.

The major's attitude toward his charges is a healthy one. On the day I visited Boley, 75 Negro junior police from Guthrie came out to spend a day frolicking at the institution. McCormick keeps the gates open—he wants the community to help these boys.

After watching his own boys and the "good" boys from Guthrie playing together for a while, he turned to me and said:

### *"A Good Set of Boys"*

"You know, there's very little difference between the two sets of boys. In many cases, I've got the ones who get caught; a lot of the other kids are the uncaught. Very few kids go through their early years without breaking the law a few times. But I'll tell you some-

thing, sir—I wouldn't trade my boys for that group from Guthrie. No sir, I got a good set of boys."

Later in the day, I got a chance to talk to a number of the boys. I came away with the same opinion of them the major has.

For example, Bobby, aged 15. He comes from a family of five brothers and three sisters. His mother was sickly and couldn't take care of the children; his father died when the children were very young.

**B**OBBY got to running around with older boys. One night he broke into a home and stole a flashlight. He's been at Boley a year, is a good hand in the laundry. But he's having trouble in school—he's in the sixth grade—and he doesn't know what he's going to do when he gets out.

George is 20. He's been at Boley nearly five years. Both his parents are dead; he'd lived with an aunt from the time he was a little boy. He was doing all right in school and at home until he knocked a thumb out of joint playing football. There was no money for medical attention. Blood poisoning set in and George eventually lost his left arm.

From then on, he was a problem child. He didn't like it at his aunt's any more. He started out for California, was picked up and sent to Boley. He's

been a well-behaved boy at Boley. He ran off to Oklahoma City once, but returned to Boley of his own accord a few days later, heart-broken in the knowledge no employer wanted to hire a one-armed boy.

He's fairly happy at Boley. He's the star firstbaseman on the baseball team. George has his heart set on being a professional baseball player—the major doesn't know how to tell him its an ambition impossible of fulfillment. He is badly in need of some psychiatric guidance because he's going out in a few months.

Walter is 17. His father, a drunkard, died when Walter was a small child. After a few years, his mother married again—this time a minister. His stepfather didn't approve of Walter; he wouldn't let him go out at night and play with the kids.

Walter finally ran off. He stole a bicycle and was sent to Boley. He has difficulty in school—he's in the second grade—and it worries him.

"I can't learn easy, but they won't help me with the hard things," he told me. "I want to be a mechanic, but I can't understand reading and arithmetic."

He wants to go home.

And so on, case after case. Bad boys? Little criminals? Hardly. Again, 123 boys with problems they need help with.

**W**HEN Major H. C. McCormick took over as superintendent at Boley, he started to work on the tough kids, the ones with the biggest chips on their shoulders against society. The biggest trouble-maker was an 18-year-old named Frank.

Frank had been a gang leader, had been involved in a number of burglaries—in fact, had caused so much trouble he'd broken up his home. The file in the office described him as "incorrigible." His family had never been to visit him, never written him a letter.

McCormick called Frank in and told him that, since he had led a gang before, he was going to give him a gang to lead now. He assigned Frank a group of eight younger boys, warning him he was responsible for everything they did.

It was a tough go the first few months. But McCormick kept working on Frank. Whenever he went to town, he took Frank along and introduced him to the men downtown as "one of the best leaders I got at the school."

For a year before his release, Frank talked to the Major about going into the Army. On the day of his release, Frank said he was going to Oklahoma City to enlist.

"I told Frank I'd carry him to the city," McCormick said. "Several of our kids had been rejected by the Army in the past year because of their delinquency records. If this happened to Frank, it would tear down all I'd built up over a two-year period. While Frank was taking his physical, I had a long talk with the recruiting officer. Frank was accepted."

A year later, Frank returned to the Boley school. He was a staff sergeant in charge of an infantry platoon. He told the boys to "pay mind to the Major."



AS you enter the building for Negro boy orphans at Taft, there is a picture of Charles Johnson, considered the founding father of the institution, alongside of which there is an inscription: "He hath wrought well for his people."

Charles Johnson may have wrought well, but successive legislatures have wrought poorly by the institutions at Taft. Included on its grounds are the deaf, blind and orphans institute, under whose jurisdiction come both boy and girl orphans, and the training school for delinquent Negro girls.

The majority of the 49 boy orphans are housed in a dormitory which is as bad as the main dormitory for boys at Boley. The walls are badly in need of a paint job, window casings are rotting, two or three boys have to share one battered wooden locker, and only three of the 14 windows have screens. On a summer day, the flies and mosquitoes are a constant torture.

There is a separate cottage for the younger boys which houses infants on up to 12-year-olds. National standards point out it is impossible to care for children under 6 years of age in an institution. To this standard, the weary

matron at Taft who is on duty 24 hours a day caring for 27 of these children nods a tired assent.

The building for older girl orphans is the best on the grounds. Constructed in 1946, it boasts a fine living room and the sleeping quarters are attractively furnished. However, the cottage for younger girls is, like the one on the boys' side, an unclassified melange of infants and girls up to 11 and 12 years of age.

The 49 delinquent girls are housed in a separate building. Its most striking feature is the iron dormitory door which is kept locked at all times. Every time a girl wants to go anywhere on the grounds, she has to ask the matron to unlock the door for her.

I asked the matron in charge why it was necessary to lock the door at all times.

"That's obvious," she answered. "If we didn't keep them locked in, they'd all run away."

Of course, the implication of her statement was that the locked gate kept the girls from running off. Without going into a discussion of what a crushing effect this 24-hour a day repression had

on formative young minds, how was the locked gate policy working?

I HADN'T been out of the building more than an hour after hearing this discourse on the efficacy of the "keep 'em locked up" policy when the alarm went off. Three girls had escaped! Further checking disclosed a number of escapes in the past few months, and an alarmingly high number over a yearly period.

What is the pay-off? Maj. McCormick kept the gate open at Boley; he had few escapes. At Taft, the girls' training school was locked tight; there were plenty of escapes.

### *Physical Facilities Apalling*

In touring the grounds, you got the impression the run-down physical facilities cast a pall over attempts by a few staff members to humanize the institution. Omnipresent were ceiling leaks rotting window casings, worn-out fire prevention equipment, drab benches, abominable toilet facilities, dilapidated open-face stoves, and so on.

Ironically enough, the best building on the grounds was the canning plant. Run by a most efficient supervisor, it boasted its own power plant and the latest in mechanical equipment. Adjoining it was a peanut butter plant complete with roaster, cooling vats, and other modern appurtenances. Both plants were immaculately clean. Perhaps some legislative committees had pointed with pride to these plants, neglecting for the moment to bother with a study of buildings housing humans instead of peanuts.

School facilities at Taft are limited. Classes are conducted in an obsolete building. Major weakness is lack of a specialized study and remedial program for the dishearteningly large number of children who are years behind in their schoolwork.

The vocational training program is haphazard. There is a limited shoe-making program, with seven or eight boys studying shoe repair during the regular school year. Efforts have been made to set up barbering and tailoring programs, most useful to orphans, but appropriations requests for these items have never gone through.

The delinquent and orphan girls fare much better. There is a home-making cottage where cooking, sewing, typing and other useful occupations are taught.

Medical services are poor. There is no quarantine or medical reception

service for incoming orphans and delinquents. The children are not checked for contagious diseases, needed operations, and so on. The superintendent said many of the children should have had their tonsils and adenoids removed, but hospital facilities were not adequate. There is just a small clinic presided over by a nurse who dispenses medications.

The staff is inadequate, poorly paid and works long hours. Matrons on duty 24 hours a day—with those handling the younger children going through a tough night trick after a hard day's work—get \$75 a month plus maintenance. Maintenance is usually a room in the dormitory where they work. They get one day off a week.

The supervisor of the older boys, well-liked and with a fine educational background, receives \$100 a month. The two cooks, who work a 12 to 13 hour day, receive \$80 a month.

There is no director of recreation, and the children have little or no opportunity for outside play. Considering the fact there are 150 children jammed in just a few buildings at Taft, this is a serious weakness.

### *Case Record System Is Poor*

Not only is there no social service work, but the case record "system" is about the poorest at any of the institutions. When he came to Taft, the new superintendent discovered boy orphans who had been there three years without a single line of case history on them.

He cites the case of one boy whose legal commitment they have never been able to locate. His mother collects alimony for the child, telling the court she is supporting him. The mother comes out and visits the child, telling him he doesn't have to obey the supervisors, since there is no record of his legal commitment. He is one of the toughest disciplinary problems on the grounds.

Since its doors were first opened, the consolidated institutions at Taft, which include the deaf, blind and orphans institute in addition to the training school for Negro girls, have fallen prey to some of the most active "politicking" in the state.

Rival factions through the years have in turn run the institutions, or sniped at those temporarily in power.

For many years Ed Goodwin, powerful Negro politician and newspaper publisher, ran the children's institutions at Taft in addition to the consolidated Negro mental hospital. Goodwin was removed as business manager of the

entire setup last December, and last April Mrs. T. E. Grissom, then superintendent of the children's institutions, was asked to resign after a check-up by the board of affairs.

THE new superintendent is H. W. McNamee, a school teacher and school official for the past 35 years. A graduate of Langston, a cultured and intelligent person, he rolled up his sleeves in a sincere effort to clean up the mess which existed when he took over.

### *Morale Problem Is Difficult*

He is having a hard job picking up the children's morale. Excessive whippings and punishments under previous regimes have left scars, both literal and figurative. The girls deeply resented Mrs. Grissom's practice of letting the matrons appoint privileged girls who served as monitors and were given power to whip "bad" girls.

McNamee is slowly relaxing the punitive, harsh disciplines. However, he has several matrons who have spent time under previous regimes. They say its the same only story—"You've got to beat these girls down or they'll run off with the place."

He is not too happy with the location of the new girls training school building, situated on the other side of the tracks just beyond the Taft mental hospital. Goodwin's pet project, it was supposedly built because Goodwin regarded the mingling of the delinquent girls with the orphans as "dangerous."

McNamee, who is conversant with standard literature on the running of children's institutions, goes along with progressive thinkers who denounce the unnatural isolation of delinquent children.

"I suppose I'll get a lot of criticism for saying this, but I think there is little essential difference between the orphans here and the delinquents," he told me.

"They are all products of broken homes, of a lack of opportunity for social development. Why isolate one group, point the finger at them, let them think they are pariahs?"

McNamee is somewhat annoyed because when the delinquent girls move into the new building, they will be deprived of many of the campus facilities they now enjoy along with the orphans.

For example, take Harriet, 18. She was sent to Taft at the age of 16 for stealing a dress. She denies that she took it. Her father left home when Harriet was six; her mother was unable to take care of the eight children in the family.

Under the Grissom regime, she was severely whipped by older girls who served as monitors. She still bears the scars on her back. She is not too bitter about it, though; she has a remarkably mature attitude.

"Maybe some of us did break some rules," she told me. "But we were old enough to be talked to sensibly. I don't think beatings did us any good. I got mad once and ran off."

Harriet has been co-operative under McNamee, whom she referred to as "a very intelligent, very nice man."

### *Why the Girls Ran Off*

I also talked to two of the three girls who had run off that day.

Mary, 20, has been at the girls' orphanage 12 years. Her mother and father separated when she was eight years old. There's a big family; she has a sister at the training school for delinquent girls, and a brother at the orphanage.

She ran off because she thinks they are keeping her illegally.

"I'm 20 years old—most of the girls get to go home when they're 18."

June, 16, ran off from the girls training school. Her father abandoned the family when June was a small child; she doesn't know if her mother married again.

"I ran off because they keep me locked up all day," she told me. "I don't think that's fair. Besides, I don't like the matron I have now—she always puts us under restrictions."

"I don't understand," she said. "Lots of the girls get to go home when they're 18. Nobody ever explains these things."

McNamee and Major McCormick, superintendent at Boley, were classmates at Langston university 40 years ago.

After college McNamee became a school teacher and, in 35 years rose to district superintendent. McCormick went into the banking business in 1915 as bookkeeper and cashier. He went into institutional work when Gov. Marland appointed him superintendent of the consolidated children's institutions at Taft in 1935.

## CONCLUSIONS

### MANY POLICY CHANGES MUST BE MADE BEFORE A REFORM PROGRAM CAN SUCCEED

**I**N approaching the problem of Oklahoma's institutions for the care of delinquents and orphans, it becomes apparent certain policy changes must be made before a reform program can succeed.

The first, and probably principal, fault is that these institutions and all other agencies which have supervision of the wayward or destitute child, are political footballs. At present these institutions are completely governed by the board of affairs, a group of laymen whose composition changes with each administration.

As a result, there has never been a consistent program for the operation of the training schools and orphanages. Turn-over among institutional superintendents and personnel has been high, and each turn-over has brought with it a maze of changes. The present state board of affairs undoubtedly is the best that has ever governed these institutions; when it goes out two years from now, odds culled from the experience of this and other states are that the major portion of its work will be discarded.

Running a program for the successful diagnosis and rehabilitation of wayward children is a professional problem, to be dealt with by persons who have studied this field.

A little over a year ago, the people of Oklahoma took from the board of affairs administration of the state's six mental hospitals because of their conviction this was a professional problem, not a political one. The running of the state's five children's institutions is just as much a professional problem.

The second major fallacy in Oklahoma, and in many other states, is the idea that children's institutions are places where youngsters who commit crimes against society must be made to pay retribution.

In the face of a century and a half of failure to reform delinquents, it is amazing how this fallacy has continued to persist. I have pointed out that four out of five prisoners at Granite were graduates of our boys' training school.

Recent studies in Massachusetts, California and Illinois, which traced careers of graduates of reform schools, showed that the large majority of them pursued careers of crime. Who then can deny that children's institutions, as at present constituted, are schools for crime rather than for rehabilitation?

In 1945, Wisconsin—which is much concerned with the welfare of its young citizens—created a joint legislative committee on juvenile delinquency. The committee spent two years touring the state, listening to testimony of 4,000 people in all walks of life. Here is one of their major conclusions, reported to the 1947 session of the legislature:

"To this day, our whole system of treatment of criminals and delinquents is permeated with the idea of retribution and punishment. And so our criminologists propose that we try something different. They are ready to abandon the system of punishment for crime, not on the basis of whether it is right or wrong to punish violators, but purely on the basis of the objective test of what system produces the best results. They are concerned only with how society can be protected. . . ."

The third major fallacy is probably the most serious in its effects upon Oklahoma's children's institutions. It consists in assigning youngsters to various institutions with no preliminary study of personality or case history.

At every children's institution in the state, I encountered feeble-minded children who belonged at Enid. At Enid, there are a number of children who don't belong there; they can benefit considerably by educational training. At all of the institutions, sex perverts, the mentally ill, defective delinquents, and the retarded mingle with one another in a mass of misplacement and confusion.

In recent years a number of states have set out to study the individual offender. In this way, the Youth Authority idea was born. Its application to Oklahoma could be effected so easily it is worth some study.

CALIFORNIA pioneered with the establishment of a Youth Authority in 1941. Its governing board is a panel of three social welfare experts appointed by the governor. In order to provide safeguards against political appointments, two of the three members are chosen from a panel submitted by interested organizations such as the state medical association and the state bar association.

In Wisconsin, whose system is most applicable to Oklahoma, an advisory youth service commission of 11 unpaid members, consisting of outstanding citizens representing all parts of the state and representing public health, schools, welfare and civic organizations, nominates a director of youth services. Similar advisory commissions function in Massachusetts and Minnesota.

Oklahoma at present has a Children's Code Commission. A highly qualified group, it might serve as the Oklahoma Youth Service Commission. In the same way the mental health board chooses a mental health director it could choose a director of the Youth Authority. The director's qualifications vary from state to state, but usually include, as a minimum, a graduate degree in social work and at least five years experience in running an institution for children.

The central principle of the Youth Authority is professional study and rehabilitation of the individual offender. It is given control of the youngster from the time he is committed by the juvenile court. Commitment to a specific institution is abolished; all children under 20 are turned over to the Authority except those facing a life term or a death sentence.

After the child is committed to the Youth Authority, his first stop is at the state diagnostic center where he remains for four to six weeks. He is given physical and psychological examinations. A placement officer digs up every available piece of data on the boy's background.

Between examinations and interviews, each child carries on a life as nearly normal as possible. He follows an organized program varied enough to give him an opportunity to make choices—study, vocational training, work, sports, play, relaxation. Skilled workers watch how he gets along with others, how he reacts to discipline, what his major behavior traits are.

At the end of the diagnostic period a complete report on every aspect of the child is drawn up. One copy is sent to the Youth Authority. There a group of specialists determine the plan of

treatment. It may be decided the boy needs psychiatric treatment; he would be referred to the mental hygiene clinic at Sunbeam home for it. Or he may be placed in a foster home to try to provide an adequate substitute for harmful conditions in the child's own home. Intelligence tests may have indicated he is feeble-minded; he will then be sent to Enid. Or it may be decided one of the state training schools offers the best opportunity.

If he is sent to a training school, a copy of all tests at the diagnostic center goes with him. At the institution a classification committee, on the basis of the tests and the Authority's recommendations, assigns him to a certain unit and certain activities.

### *Yearly Examination Is Needed*

In addition to the initial diagnosis of the child, the Youth Authority is required to make subsequent examinations at least once a year to see how the program of rehabilitation is coming. On the basis of subsequent testing, the boy may be transferred to another institution, to a foster home, or maybe to a clinic.

A lot of this may seem Utopian, but Oklahoma is in a much better position to put this into effect right now than almost any other state in the country.

It now has a mobile psychological unit, working out of the University of Oklahoma, which has done pioneer testing and diagnostic work at Enid and Helena. Some of its findings have been startling; the number of cases of incorrect placement it has uncovered would fill many a heart-rending page. Both Mrs. Anna T. Scruggs, Enid superintendent, and Lee Ford, formerly head of Helena, have gone on record as saying that the mobile unit's work has been indispensable in understanding individual personalities.

But the unit has not achieved maximum effectiveness because it can only make hit or miss stops at these institutions once a month. If it were established as a permanent unit, and there are facilities for it on the University of Oklahoma's north campus, it could do a year-round job for all the institutions. Assigned to it, in addition to clinical psychologists, would be a full-time physician, a full-time social worker, and part-time psychiatric services.

In Oklahoma, delinquent and dependent children bounding around from jail to training school to orphanage to reformatory are like so many rowboats being batted about in a gale. The school



doesn't know the child is in jail; the jail doesn't know he has a truancy record; neither one knows he spent a year at Helena; officials at Helena don't know what's happened to him since he was paroled.

**T**HAT'S one of the great contributions of the Youth Authority idea. It takes these kids who have been rattling around and puts them under a microscope. Then, having arrived at some understanding of them, it prescribes treatment plans leading to their rehabilitation.

It is no wonder children's services in Oklahoma are all vague when you consider the number of agencies which have their fingers in the pie. The state board of affairs, the charities and corrections commission, the state department of public welfare, the crippled children's commission, the juvenile courts, county welfare departments, and others too numerous to mention—all have a whack at the child, with no over-all coordination.

During its first years, the Youth Authority idea was opposed by a minority of judges who felt it modified their powers of sentence. However, recently there has been a fine spirit of co-operation.

Youth Authorities in other states—California, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Massachusetts—have had to overhaul their children's institutions in order to make the authority idea a success. On the institutional level, the following minimal steps would be needed in Oklahoma:

**1**—Qualified personnel would have to be recruited to staff them. Ellingston puts a prime staff qualification this way: "Enough understanding of human behavior and personality to know that conduct, desirable or undesirable, is not the result of moral perversity or original sin; that it is largely the result of past experiences and that the only active way to alter it is through satisfying new relationships and experiences."

### *Better Pay, Shorter Day*

In order to recruit professionally trained people wages will have to be increased. The present 72-hour plus week will have to be reduced considerably, and better living quarters will have to be provided.

Staffs at all the institutions will have to be augmented. Efforts must be made to approach the national standard ration of one housemother for every 20 children. At least one social worker should be placed at each institution.

Competent vocational instructors must be employed, licensed by the state to teach certain trades; also qualified teachers who can give specialized instruction to retarded children.

**2**—Each institution must set up a classification system in conformity with the recommendations of the diagnostic center. Most states functioning under a Youth Authority have set up completely separate institutions for young offenders; until this state is ready for that, it must separate them from the older offenders by classification within the institution.

### *Reception Cottages Vital*

Every progressive institution has a classification committee, usually consisting of the superintendent, the social worker, the vocational director and one or two house mothers. They hold case conferences at least once a month.

**3**—There should be a reception cottage at every institution where all newcomers should spend several weeks before being given permanent quarters. It should be an orientation center where understanding workers introduce the child to institutional life.

**4**—The physical plants of all institutions should be improved. First priority is the building of cottages at Boley to replace the dormitory which now houses 140 boys.

Facilities for vocational training are poor. Additional shops are needed. All the institutions need a general overhauling so that they may come to resemble homes rather than camps for displaced persons.

Many states have instituted training courses for workers in children's institutions. California has a 90-day seminar for group supervisors. North and South Carolina workers take a six-week course at Duke. A number of states are moving toward the licensing of housemothers. Hopkirk, who has studied 350 children's institutions, estimates there are 30,000 house-parents and similar workers in the country who need at least a basic 60-hour course in child care and behavior.

One of the cardinal principles of all Youth Authorities is the provision giving them the power to discharge children from custody as soon as they deem them ready for society. This marks an important revolution. Instead of requiring the child to serve out a punitive sentence with no thought of rehabilitation, the Authority has, as its duty, fitting the youth for adjustment in the community. The Youth Authority does

not take over the function of the judge or the legislature in measuring the length of time a youth must serve to pay off his debt to society. Instead, the function ceases to exist. The object is rehabilitation, not social vengeance.

**T**HEREFORE, release date for each child depends on many factors. The period of training that will suffice for one boy will not be long enough for another. Some boys have psychological and emotional problems which require a longer period of study. Then too, a major factor is the finding of a place for the child.

In getting the children placed properly, a job which Oklahoma is not even attempting to do today, the various Youth Authorities in other states have set up placement officer systems.

For example, California's is broken up into five districts. A number of placement officers are assigned a certain quota of children from each district. The placement officer first picks up his charge at the diagnostic center. He establishes friendly relations with the child and starts thinking right then of eventual placement for the youngster.

When the boy is about ready for release, the placement officer lines up whatever deal is best for the boy—maybe a return to the home, maybe a job, maybe further vocational training. Most important, when the boy gets back in the community, the placement officer watches him carefully, checking his social contacts, his companionships, his schoolwork, etc.

The role of the placement officer cannot be over-emphasized. Ellingston writes this of his importance in California.

"The California Authority considers the placement officer the main connecting link between it and the community. It insists that the officer take an active part in the community's program for prevention and correction, that he work closely with courts, district attorneys, police, probation officers, school guidance departments and welfare groups, and build contacts with employers who can provide jobs."

These officers are not political hacks. They work under civil service—there are four grades ranging from \$2,880 to \$5,280 a year.

The Youth Authority doesn't stop with a complete rehabilitation program for young offenders. Its contribution has been equally great in the field of prevention and control of juvenile delinquency. As Ellingston puts it:

"By itself, more efficient correction at the state level amounts to endless bailing of the boat without trying to stop the ever-widening leak. Common sense calls for exertion of the major effort at the point where delinquents and criminals develop."

**S**TATES which have adopted Youth Authorities have used them as GHQ's for an attack on delinquency. California has organized summer workshops and university courses for the benefit of law enforcement officials, teachers, welfare and recreational workers and civic leaders.

Its greatest contribution has been the evolving of an amazingly effective delinquency survey technique. It sends into each county upon request teams of specialists to make, without cost to the county, confidential surveys of youth-serving agencies and activities along with practical recommendations for improvement.

In sum, its job is the coordination of all agencies and facilities toward the vital job of cutting down today the number of young offenders who up until now have become the criminals of tomorrow. In Oklahoma, no attempt has ever been made to pull together the agencies which deal with the young offender at one level or another.

Has the Youth Authority idea worked? California, which set it up in 1941, recently released statistics on 6,628 boys and girls released on parole from Youth Authority facilities from June, 1943, to July, 1947.

During that four-year period, only 14 percent of the parolees were involved in any sort of parole violation. This is a phenomenally low percentage, about 66 percent lower than is found in this state at the present time.

In summing up, here's a quote on the faith behind the Youth Authority:

"Faith in the dignity and value of every human being is the string that links the multiple and diverse aspects of the program, like beads, into a harmonious whole. Diagnosis, treatment to help restore the offender's self-confidence and self-respect, the elimination of the degrading jail and of the mass-custody prison, the subordination of force and regimentation to scientific care—these and all the other correctional procedures outlined grow out of a sincere faith in the supreme value of the individual."

Don't we in Oklahoma have that faith in the dignity and value of our children?

#### IN APPRECIATION

*THE Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene wishes to thank former State Senator Fred Chapman of Ardmore for the sponsorship of this booklet. The Committee owes Mr. Chapman—who as chairman of the Mental Hospital Investigating Committee of the twenty-first legislature spearheaded the courageous fight for reform in our mental hospitals—a deep debt it can never adequately repay. His present interest in child welfare reforms, stemming from a lifetime of helping children in distress, is further evidence, if any is needed, that he is one of Oklahoma's most forward looking statesmen and citizens.*